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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7606th meeting

Tuesday, 19 January 2016, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Cancela	(Uruguay)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Zagaynov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Gracia Aldaz
	Ukraine	Mr. Kyslytsya
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2015/453)

Letter dated 6 January 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2016/22)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Seventieth anniversary of the first meeting of the Security Council

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Before we begin our consideration of the topic of today's open debate, I would like to take a few minutes to commemorate a very important date, namely, the seventieth anniversary of the first meeting of the Security Council, which was held on 17 January 1946.

Days after the holding of the first meeting of the General Assembly, on 11 January 1946, the Security Council met to elect its first non-permanent members. As a result of those elections, Australia, Brazil, Egypt, Mexico, the Netherlands and Poland joined the five permanent members at the Council meeting a week later. At that historic meeting it was decided that the presidency of the Security Council would rotate each month among the members in alphabetical order. Therefore, Australia became the first country to assume the presidency of the Council.

In 1946, this body was composed of 11 members, which represented 22 per cent of the Organization's membership. Uruguay was part of the Security Council for the first time in 1965. It has returned this year to be a member of this organ after a 51 absence. Today, the Security Council's 15 members represent 8 per cent of the 193 States Members of the United Nations.

What is truly important today is to ask ourselves to what extent, throughout its 70 years of existence, the Security Council has fulfilled its primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations. Throughout its history the Council has mounted some 70 peacekeeping operations, the vast majority of which successfully implemented their mandates. In other situations, the Council has used measures within its scope, pursuant to Chapters VI and VII of the Charter, to put a halt to conflicts. However, situations of grave conflict, which continue to be on the Council's agenda, testify to the work that remains to be done for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2015/453)

Letter dated 6 January 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2016/22)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Albania, Armenia, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Latvia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Maldives, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Eveline Rooijmans, Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor at Oxfam.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following to participate in this meeting: Mr. João Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, and Mr. Téte António, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations.

I also propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in that regard.

I further propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in that regard.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/453, which conains the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

I also wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/22, which contains the text of a letter dated 6 January 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I warmly welcome Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, to whom I now give the floor.

The Deputy Secretary-General: I warmly welcome Uruguay's initiative to hold today's debate. The number of speakers is a clear sign of the urgency and importance of today's subject.

Over the past 40 years, progress has been made in establishing international norms to enhance the protection of civilians and to make sure that perpetrators of violations are brought to justice. The Security Council has played a central role in that regard, which we deeply appreciate. Despite that, the reality on the ground is grim and bleak. In conflicts around the world, great numbers of civilians are deliberately or recklessly killed, maimed, tortured and abducted. Sexual violence is rampant.

Hospitals must be treated as sanctuaries in wartime. But recently we have seen a surge in attacks on hospitals and health centres. In Afghanistan, an air strike destroyed a surgical ward with devastating consequences. In Yemen, hospitals have been attacked, and children who were not killed by bullets and bombs are now dying from the lack of medicine and health care.

Today, I echo the words of the Secretary-General and of the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Peter Maurer — and I am glad the ICRC Vice-President is present here today — who last October called for an end to such blatant violations of international law. They said: "Enough is enough. Even war has rules. It is time to enforce them."

In 2014, civilians madeup 92 per cent of the people killed or injured by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas in situations of armed conflict. That carnage of innocent people must not continue. Only today, we learned that 19,000 civilians were killed in Iraq between January 2014 and October 2015. We must all work to achieve solid political commitments to refrain from using explosive weapons in populated areas, in accordance with international humanitarian law, which is now so often neglected.

We have all seen the horrible reality in Madaya, Syria, where thousands of people have been denied food and medical treatment for months, leading to starvation and death. Let us remember that Madaya is just one place where, shamefully, this is happening today, in the twenty-first century. Sieges were a medieval phenomenon, and now we see them happening in the contemporary world. A siege that denies people access to the basic necessities of life is one of the gravest violations of international law and an affront to our shared humanity, which the Secretary-General has, in the clearest of terms, condemned during these past days, naming such violations war crimes. Such crimes simply must stop, and they must do so immediately.

The barbarity of non-State extremist armed groups, such as Daesh, Boko Haram and others, present new challenges. Those groups brazenly and brutally murder thousands of people, kidnap young girls, systematically deny women their rights, destroy cultural institutions and undermine the peaceful values of religions. Their aim is obviously to instil fear and to divide and destroy the social fabric of our societies. I urge members to do everything possible to address this threat in a determined, comprehensive and rights-based manner.

In the face of such violations and developments, what can the international community do?

First, we must consistently remind parties to armed conflict of their obligations to uphold international law and to respect and protect all civilians and civilian objects, including humanitarian workers and facilities. The loss of life is mounting among humanitarian workers, who courageously are striving to gain access to people in need. We must all unequivocally condemn violations and use all the tools at our disposal to bring about compliance with international humanitarian law. For that, we need the Council's leadership.

Secondly, we must do much more to prevent conflicts and situations that place civilians at risk. That requires consideration and action on the part of the Security Council and careful monitoring of violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law. Generally, the whole United Nations system must continuously seek to resolve tensions and conflicts through mediation and other peaceful methods to settle

disputes, as listed in Articles 33 and 34 of Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations, which members have before them to check.

Thirdly, where violations persist, there must be accountability. Governments should adopt robust criminal legislation and strengthen their judicial systems in order to prosecute perpetrators. They need to establish national fact-finding mechanisms and, where deemed necessary, set up independent commissions of inquiry. Judicial bodies such as the International Criminal Court are to be used when national prosecution options are not available. All States should accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

When violence erupts and the threat of conflict is growing, we all have a responsibility to act. The Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative requests all United Nations staff to react early and with courage in the face of escalating risks of large-scale violations. We are committed to bring situations of concern to the attention of Member States. The failure to give early warning so as to ensure accountability is in itself a threat to peace and security. The resulting impunity emboldens perpetrators to escalate their brutality, as we have seen in several cases. It contributes to the erosion of international human rights and humanitarian law and to further loss of civilian lives.

Fourthly, Governments must do more to protect people displaced by conflict, particularly those who are vulnerable, primarily women and children. Policies and legal frameworks aimed at protecting refugees and internally displaced people must be strengthened and strictly implemented. The high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants, to be held on 19 September 2016, will also be an opportunity to focus on those issues.

The report (see S/2015/446) of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, entitled "Uniting our strengths for peace: politics, partnership and people", pointed to a significant gap between expectations and reality when it comes to the ability of missions to protect civilians. The Secretary-General's subsequent report (S/2015/682) announced several measures to close that gap. Peacekeeping operations must respond with speed and determination in the face of threats to civilians. The opening of mission gates to desperate people in South Sudan is one example of such determination in practice. Missions must also report directly and frankly on obstacles and failures to act. Missions are to advocate strongly for the protection of civilians. They should support host Governments' efforts to protect their people by strengthening human rights, the rule of law and inclusive institutions.

Dialogue between the Security Council, the Secretariat and troop- and police-contributing countries is critical. Each must ensure that the United Nations never stands idly by in the face of attacks on civilians. States should build on the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, inter alia through peacekeeping, which were agreed last year. Zero tolerance for cases of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel must be strictly adhered to. The recommendations of the panel set up after reported abuses in the Central African Republic are being taken seriously by the Secretary-General. We are now working on a robust programme aimed at strengthening prevention, enforcement and remedial action in the area of sexual exploitation and abuse. I welcome the Security Council's presidential statement of November 2015, which recommitted the Council to address the protection of civilians as a core issue (S/PRST/2015/22). When civilians are under violent attack, often from all sides, as we now see far too often, it is particularly important that the protection of civilians be at the centre of the Council's deliberations.

In conclusion, let me say that protecting civilians in armed conflict will be one of the central themes of the World Humanitarian Summit, to be held in Istanbul on 23 and 24 May. We must seize the opportunity of the Summit to make progress on the serious challenges that we face today. Respect for the norms established to safeguard our humanity will be one of the priorities of the Summit. We must redouble our efforts and take ever more concrete action to ensure the protection of civilians and enhance respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law. It is time to restore knowledge, to restore awareness and to restore faith in those instruments and demonstrate in practice that we are serious about placing human beings at the centre of our work at the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Beerli.

Ms. Beerli: I thank you, Mr. President, for inviting the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to address the Security Council on the subject of the

protection of civilians, a subject that the Council has put at the centre of many of its resolutions, including on Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, the Central African Republic and the Lake Chad region.

In 2015, ICRC operations reached more than 40 million people, including more civilians than ever before in its history. Regrettably, we see the underlying trend of increasing humanitarian needs as likely to continue over the next year.

International humanitarian law on the protection of civilians in international and non-international armed conflict is clearly established and binding on all parties to armed conflict, State and non-State alike. The ICRC continues to believe that the current legal framework for the protection of civilians remains relevant and that the main challenge in protecting civilians centres on greater compliance with international humanitarian law by all parties to armed conflicts.

For the ICRC, working on the ground with the victims of armed conflict, it is obvious that political action ultimately determines the fate of civilian populations. If there no political solutions to armed conflict can be reached, then many millions of people will continue to endure the personal tragedy and humanitarian consequences of armed conflict for years, decades or even lifetimes.

This year, we will mark the fifth anniversary of the Syrian crisis. Syria has in many ways become an emblematic conflict, with immense suffering on the part of the civilian population. In terms of violations of the law, that conflict is emblematic of a restrictive interpretation of humanitarian space, of the illegal use of weapons and of the use of illegal weapons, all of which have led to dramatic displacements of people, in turn putting pressure on neighbouring States' basic services and their social fabric.

The link between the suffering and the lack of respect for international humanitarian law could not be clearer, when you talk to the severely malnourished people of Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya, as my colleagues have done over the past weeks. Women, men and children have died, and unless full compliance with international humanitarian law is assured, many more are at risk of dying. Today, the overwhelming humanitarian needs necessitate that the sieges be lifted immediately. The Security Council has the possibility to support and practice confidential engagement for the respect of the law, in Syria and elsewhere. On behalf of the civilians that the ICRC serves in armed conflicts around the world, I urge the Council to do so.

All the foregoing suggests that much more needs to be done to resolve armed conflicts. In that regard, the emphasis in last year's High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations on the primacy of politics and the need for political solutions to be in the driver's seat of United Nations efforts is important and timely. The ICRC welcomes the Panel's recognition that the protection of civilians is a core obligation of the United Nations. We also recognize that the single greatest contribution to ending the suffering of civilians in armed conflict is always the effective prevention and resolution of armed conflict.

With that in mind, the ICRC urges the Council to find consensus wherever it can and to build the necessary political strategies that will prevent and end armed conflicts. Where there is no end to an armed conflict and when international humanitarian law applies, compliance with international humanitarian law is critical to ensuring the protection of civilians.

The conduct of hostilities — the way armed conflicts are fought — is the key determinant of civilian suffering. The misuse of weapons, direct attacks against civilians and civilian populations and indiscriminate attacks, starvation and displacement that become part of a military strategy and attacks against health-care facilities all too often combine to create civilian suffering that involves serious violations of international humanitarian law.

In the ICRC's experience, much widespread harm and suffering caused by armed conflict is wrongly seen as an inevitable consequence of war when in fact it is frequently a violation of law. Far too much civilian suffering in these last years has resulted from a failure of the parties to a conflict to take into account the protection of civilians in the conduct of military operations and to strike the appropriate balance between military necessity and humanitarian imperatives as required by international humanitarian law.

Yet violations of international humanitarian law occur daily: explosive weapons are used indiscriminately in populated areas; civilian populations and civilian objects are deliberately targeted; civilian communities are forcibly displaced, trapped in lengthy sieges and deprived of the means of survival; women and men, girls and boys are regularly the victims of rape and sexual violence; schools are attacked or used for military

purposes, leading to their loss of protection against attack; detainees are summarily executed, tortured, kept in inhumane conditions and denied due process of law. Such violations of international humanitarian law are well known to members of the Council and are often referred to explicitly in the Council's resolutions with an evident determination to end them.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is one example that raises serious concern in terms of compliance, especially in urban environments. These weapons are prone to indiscriminate effects, with often devastating consequences for civilians. Many civilians are killed or injured by such weapons. Critical infrastructure on which civilians depend for their livelihoods and survival, such as power stations, water treatment plants and hospitals, can be continuously and cumulatively damaged so that they cease to be able to provide essential services to meet people's basic needs. Precisely for those reasons, the ICRC has urged that the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area should be avoided in densely populated areas.

To address this humanitarian issue, States should make known their policies on the use of such weapons and explain how their use of explosive weapons in populated areas complies with international humanitarian law. We also ask that the upcoming third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, which will address the development of a new urban agenda, take account of the risks faced by many millions of people threatened by armed conflict and other situations of violence in today's densely populated and fast-growing cities.

The second main aspect of compliance that the ICRC would like to emphasize is the necessity for States and non-State armed groups to comply with their obligation to meet the basic needs of the population under their control and, if unable to do so, to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of relief for civilians in need, subject to their right of control. If these basic needs are not met, parties to armed conflict shall positively respond to offers of service made by impartial humanitarian organizations such as the ICRC and shall authorize their humanitarian activities, which include protection and assistance. Humanitarian activities are all those aimed at preserving life and security or seeking to restore the mental and physical well-being of victims of armed conflict. In this process, a concern to protect the dignity of a person is fundamental.

Questions of humanitarian access necessary to carry out protection and assistance activities is an aspect of international humanitarian law for which the Council has continued to express significant concern in 2015. These questions will be particularly relevant in 2016 as States prepare to make new commitments on humanitarian action at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May. At the Summit, the ICRC very much wants to see a significant and practical recommitment by States to their obligations to protect and assist the civilian population in armed conflicts. Clear recognition of the complementary albeit essential and lawful role that impartial humanitarian organizations — local and international — can play in meeting this humanitarian objective also needs to emerge from the Summit.

Practical recommitments to the rules of international humanitarian law on access, protection and assistance will be particularly important in 2016 because of the unprecedented number of internally displaced people, refugees and vulnerable migrants that are fleeing and moving because of the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict. The ICRC welcomes the United Nations summit on managing large-scale movements of migrants and refugees due to take place in September this year, and we are committed to playing a significant role in its process and debate. At the same time, we ask that a sharp focus of the Council's attention remain on the millions of internally displaced persons affected by armed conflict, many of whom die as a result of armed conflict.

The need to respect and ensure compliance with international humanitarian law is urgent. States and non-State armed groups must comply with these laws, and close the existing implementation gap. The mere existence of obligations and prohibitions is not sufficient to prevent or put a stop to suffering or to deter future violations. The rules of international humanitarian law must be known, understood and implemented by the parties to an armed conflict if its purposes are to be fulfilled. This is a multifaceted process which requires that appropriate action be taken by actors at the national, regional, and international levels.

I thank you, Mr. President, for giving the ICRC this opportunity to speak at this important debate. I hope members have heard us encourage the Council's efforts to protect civilians and urge all States to find whatever consensus is possible to prevent and resolve armed conflicts as the single best way to protect civilians. Meanwhile, as armed conflicts go on, respecting the

law is the single most impactful choice States and non-State groups can make to avoid civilian suffering.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Beerli for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Rooijmans.

Ms. Rooijmans: This meeting today is an extremely important one, as it serves as a way for the Security Council — and the global community — to take stock of their performance on the protection of civilians. Sadly, the report card is bleak.

I speak today on behalf of Oxfam, a humanitarian and development organization. Two out of every three women, men, and children we work with are affected by violence and conflict, and the protection of civilians is at the heart of our mission. In our experience, what people we work with call for is not just relief; it is protection. Yet every day — from Yemen to South Sudan — we witness the failure to protect civilians and its human impact.

Yemen, for example, has seen more than 8,000 civilian casualties since the start of the conflict. Some 14.4 million people are food insecure, and this is not because of natural circumstances but because of the fighting and insecurity. Rabab, a 33-year-old woman who now lives in Amran with her eight children, told Oxfam recently:

> "Our kids are scared, we are tired and homeless and we keep moving without knowing where we will end up. We need the foreign Governments that are supporting this war to work together to end it. Enough blood! Innocent people are dying daily, and for what? In the name of what, exactly?"

In Syria, every month, every day, there are reports of more barrel bombs and mortar and missile attacks, and of starving civilians in besieged towns. Close to 300,000 people have been killed since 2011, and more than half of the population have fled their homes.

In South Sudan, deadly fighting has left tens of thousands dead, more than 2 million people displaced and even more going severely hungry. At the same time, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan is facing difficulties in implementing its mandate of protecting civilians across the country.

These are just three of the many places around the world where civilians are under threat, trapped in conflict every day. Let us keep those civilians at heart and in the forefront of our minds today as we discuss protection and as we find ways together to bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality, and between what the international community has already committed to doing and what is actually happening.

Let me share a few examples. World leaders must recommit to upholding international humanitarian law. We urge parties to conflicts to refrain from bombing or shelling populated areas. Member States should support the process under way to negotiate an international instrument to clarify international humanitarian law with regard to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

We cannot reiterate often enough the importance of prevention. When civilians face violence, such as in Burundi currently, it is critical that the Security Council act upon the early warnings in a timely manner.

The Security Council must implement the resolutions that already exist. On Syria, for example, it has condemned indiscriminate attacks, besiegement and deliberate blocks to life-saving assistance; it must now ensure that these demands are heeded.

World leaders must also implement the Arms Trade Treaty. Adhering to this Treaty means that Member States make all arms transfers subject to observance of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Failure to protect civilians has forced nearly 60 million people to flee their homes, more than at any other time since the Second World War, often taking risky and at times fatal routes as they search for safety. All countries have commitments under international law to provide assistance and protection to those seeking asylum, no matter where they are coming from.

Where there are peacekeeping missions to protect civilians, troop- and police-contributing countries must fully subscribe to and implement their mandate, and be willing and allowed to act, and use force if need be, in the face of threats to civilians.

Peace operations must also take a more people-centred approach, as recommended by both the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446) and the Secretary-General's action plan. For this people-centredness to become a reality, a fundamental transformation in terms of approach, action and culture needs to happen. A critical element thereof is engagement with communities, in

particular with the women, in a safe and respectful manner. A people-centred approach in peace operations also means employing more women, in particular among uniformed staff — that rate currently stands at a poor 4 per cent — and in leadership positions.

In fact, many of the elements that are needed to protect civilians have already been agreed, whether it is international humanitarian law, the Arms Trade Treaty, Security Council resolutions condemning violations in Syria, the women and peace and security agenda, or peacekeeping mission mandates.

A critical missing piece is implementation, the action that world leaders need to take to turn the rhetoric into reality. Without the follow-through by the Security Council and by Member States, resolutions and agreements ring hollow and civilians such as Rabab feel abandoned — and rightly so.

We must also continue to find opportunities for civilian voices to be heard by those in power: at Arria Formula meetings, when the Security Council visits conflict-affected countries, and here in this very Council Chamber.

Just yesterday, a Syrian woman sent me this message: "There is nothing dignified in what is happening to my family and my friends right now, except that we are still here and have not given up". Her resilience is enormous. However, she and all those in conflict-affected countries, need concrete measures. It is action that we need now more than ever.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Rooijmans for the information that she has provided.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay.

First of all, I should like to stress that it is an honour for Uruguay to convene this Security Council open debate to address an issue of such vital importance as the protection of civilians in armed conflict. It is of vital importance because it concerns the most elementary human right, that is, the right to life, and also because it has a bearing on the very credibility of the Organization and the hopes placed in it by the millions of people living in situations of conflict.

This topic and this debate have a very broad and deep scope. They can be approached from different angles and can find each and every one of us playing different roles and focused on different priorities, be it as members of the Security Council, where, for example, protection-of-civilians mandates are established for United Nations peacekeeping operations; countries suffering from internal conflict; troop-contributing countries; or humanitarian actors, among others.

But in spite of these differences, there is something essential that we all share: the moral and legal duty to do everything within our means to ensure that in such situations all possible efforts are made to guarantee the highest possible level of protection and to minimize civilian exposure and risk.

Regrettably, despite the courageous efforts and significant progress made, we are still falling far short of our best. The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/453) highlights in paragraph 4 the fact that "shocking levels of brutality and casual disregard for human life and dignity have come to characterize most of today's armed conflicts". Death, torture, the recruitment of child soldiers, forced disappearances, sexual and gender-based violence, summary and extrajudicial executions, attacks against schools and hospitals and the misuse of those facilities, and attacks against humanitarian personnel: these are just some of the tragic situations that today continue to affect civilians, especially women and children.

As a direct result of that escalation of violence, today we are witnessing an unprecedented humanitarian and refugee crisis. There are currently over 60 million refugees, internally displaced persons and asylum-seekers around the world, the highest number ever known. There is therefore no doubt that the protection of civilians remains one of the greatest challenges facing the United Nations system. It is a comprehensive issue with important corollaries such as the situation of children in armed conflict; sexual and gender-based violence; and the women and peace and security agenda. To address those challenges it is essential to ensure the basics, among which are respect for, and the implementation of, international humanitarian law, in particular the four Geneva Conventions and the two Additional Protocols, wherever armed conflict exists and those instruments are applicable.

Another basic issue is that of prevention. Preventing mass human rights violations is a complex issue, but it would appear to be the most advisable. The proper use, improvement and strengthening of early warning mechanisms, as well as improved coordination among

the various actors on the ground, are some of the fundamental tools of prevention. In that regard, we welcome the initiative of the Secretary-General entitled Human Rights Up Front, which focuses on the need for a prompt response to human rights violations, a preventive action plan for the protection of civilians, and better organizational preparedness to address any situation. The initiative's plan of action places improved system preparedness and preventive action to ensure respect for human rights at the centre of United Nations efforts to prevent conflict, while reaffirming the central role of human rights in the Organization's work.

But since each State has the primary responsibility to protect its population, it is in strengthening the rule of law, the institutions responsible for protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, social inclusion, non-discrimination and tolerance, that the chances of systematic violations against human rights will be significantly reduced. Acting in a coordinated manner with local authorities, it can be said that the international community has a responsibility to prevent situations that lead to attacks on civilians. Also, combatting impunity, which the perpetrators of the worst acts of violence continue to enjoy, is our shared obligation. We wish to emphasize the importance of accountability as a key element for prevention. We should make use of the various bodies established for that purpose by the international community, such as the International Criminal Court. Crimes must never be tolerated, nor can they go unpunished, regardless of their perpetrators.

When the threat is imminent, the response should be timely, decisive and legitimate. It is necessary to step up efforts to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those in greatest need. We must facilitate its rapid, safe and unhindered access to the affected territory. It should be recalled that, for more than 15 years, this body has recognized that the deliberate targeting of civilian populations or other protected persons and the systematic, flagrant and widespread violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in situations of armed conflict may constitute a threat to international peace and security.

Finally, and in line with what was said and stressed earlier with regard to the various angles and priorities of each of us, as a troop-contributing country committed to the protection of civilians, allow me to briefly bring attention to the role of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

It is important to recognize the achievements we have obtained in recent years. No one is questioning whether the protection of civilians should be a component of peacekeeping organizations; what is basically at issue here is "the how". Uruguay, aware that peacekeeping is a multidimensional activity involving many stakeholders, has made its modest contribution for several years in order to achieve the broadest possible consensus on the issue because, as we have always said, in order for protection to be effective, every link in the chain must be strong. In particular, we are proud of the work our Blue Helmets are doing in the field, and of the frank, open and constructive debate that, together with Australia, we have promoted since 2009 to the present.

However, despite progress, as stated in the report (see S/2015/446) of the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, results in the field have been mixed, with a growing gap between expectations and implementation. Fittingly, the challenge of creating realistic and achievable mandates, which was already recommended in the Brahimi report (see A/55/305), remains valid 15 years later.

Uruguay believes that the General Assembly and all the relevant bodies, including the Security Council, should conduct a thorough discussion of the recommendations contained in the report of the Independent Panel led by President and Nobel Prize laureate Ramos-Horta, and of the subsequent implementation report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/682), with a view to implementing those measures that, for example, could result in the approval of sequential mandates, would help make a qualitative leap towards effective implementation and, especially, to live up to the expectations not only of those affected, but those that we generate ourselves.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to the other members of the Security Council.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): I would like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Ms. Beerli, and Eveline Rooijmans of Oxfam International for their briefings. It is really good to have them both in the Chamber with us today.

In the period since we last held a debate on this particular issue (see S/PV.7450), the change that has happened during that period has been change in the wrong direction, as the briefers have shown very clearly. We have seen the tragic continuation and worsening of several trends on the protection-of-civilians agenda. Barrel bombs continue to fall, and human rights and international humanitarian law continue to be violated and abused. Women and children continue to be abducted, trafficked or worse. There are also disturbing new trends, such as the targeting of medical staff and facilities, the increasing use of siege and starvation as a method of warfare, and the distressing allegations of abuse committed by United Nations peacekeepers. Against that backdrop, the central issue that we should all be addressing today is what will be different next year. In that connection I took three particular things from what our briefers all said today.

First, Vice-President Beerli of the ICRC said that respecting the law is the single most impactful choice that States and non-State groups can make to avoid civilian suffering. Eveline Rooijmans of Oxfam said that many elements to protect civilians have already been agreed on but what is missing is implementation. As the Deputy Secretary-General said, the bottom line is that even wars have rules. You, Mr. President, said to us that nobody discusses anymore whether the protection of civilians should be a part of peacekeeping. What we are discussing nowadays is the "how". And that is what I wish to focus on today.

This year needs to be the year that we end the most challenging issue with regard to the protection of civilians, namely, the crisis in Syria. And I am not trying to make a political point there. We must have a list of priorities, and that must be at the top of it. The millions of civilians fleeing their homes and the thousands risking everything to cross the Mediterranean are all doing so in search of the protection and security that has been denied to them for too long. Whether at the hands of Daesh or, more likely, at the hands of Al-Assad, the brutality that they have fled is only being exacerbated by the shortfall in the international response. We all know that a political solution is the only way to end the fighting, but until one has been found, more must be done to protect those still caught up in the crisis.

That is why, on 4 February, the United Kingdom will be hosting a conference in London, along with Kuwait, Germany, Norway and the United Nations, to support Syria and the region. The conference will not just be the moment to address the funding deficit in the United Nations appeal, although that is very important in itself. It will also be the moment to address the long-term needs of those affected by the crisis by supporting job creation, providing education and, crucially, by putting ever more pressure on all the parties to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law. We need a comprehensive approach. In doing so, we hope to drive improvements in daily life and increase the confidence that is needed to underpin the political process. But let me make just one thing clear: respecting international humanitarian law is not in itself a confidence-building measure. It is an obligation, and it is an obligation on us all.

Secondly, let me look beyond Syria to the second step that we need to take this year, which is to ensure greater compliance with international humanitarian law and respect for human rights more broadly and to ensure accountability for those who have failed to do so. Others have listed other key crises at the top of the Security Council's agenda, and I think that they bear repeating. Whether it is in Yemen, South Sudan or Burundi, protecting civilians will improve the prospects for political solutions, not be a substitute for them. When national authorities refuse to comply with international humanitarian law, when they fail or are unable to prosecute individuals who commit international crimes, we must ensure accountability through domestic, regional or global mechanisms, as appropriate. We should make better use of the International Criminal Court, and we call on all States to cooperate fully with it. When the Council has referred a situation to the Court and States violate Council resolutions by failing to cooperate, the Council must follow up. The Council should also consider referring more situations to the International Criminal Court. We have failed on both counts in the past, we cannot continue that failure in 2016.

Thirdly, there are the other tools at our disposal that we must use more fully this year. The United Kingdom is proud to support the International Committee of the Red Cross, and we are actively involved, along with the Swiss, in its initiative to support and strengthen mechanisms of compliance with international humanitarian law. We support a new meeting of States to address that issue, and we encourage all States to participate in the initiative. We also look forward to the World Humanitarian Summit as an opportunity to remind the world of the importance of protecting

civilians, ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law and putting humankind at the centre of decision-making. Closer to home, we should use the tools of the United Nations itself to protect civilians to the full. That would mean implementing the recommendations on protecting civilians contained in the peacekeeping and peacebuilding reviews that you, Mr. President, mentioned.

As Ms. Rooijmans has just stressed, people and the protection of civilians must play a central role in mission-planning, mission-resourcing and activities on the ground. The United Kingdom supports the Secretary-General's commitments to inform the Council of escalating risks to civilians and of any incidents where peacekeepers have failed to implement their mandate to protect civilians. We also look forward to more frank assessments and recommendations on what peace operations can deliver and how they can improve reporting so that transparency and accountability are both increased. At a time when the United Nations is rightly being scrutinized because of the disturbing allegations of abuse against those operating under its mandate, we must demonstrate that we will do even more this year to protect those who are in our care.

Above all, I wish to emphasize one point: protecting civilians in armed conflict is at the core of the work of the United Nations. It is the issue on which we are most often judged by the world outside of the Council Chamber and yet, it is the hardest on which to make progress. We know that the challenges we face are huge, but we cannot keep holding such debates year after year, without taking concrete steps to stop the suffering. This is the year to take action.

Mr. Gracia Aldaz (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain associates itself with the statement that will be delivered subsequently by the observer of the European Union.

We thank Uruguay for having convened today's very important debate. We believe that it is extremely important to promote conflict prevention and strengthen the United Nations response in addressing emerging conflicts, as the Organization plays a key role in settling disputes by peaceful means. The use of weapons to settle disputes has its most adverse impact on the weakest in conflict situations. We believe that mediation is key to maintaining international peace, and it is a hallmark of our foreign policy. Banning attacks on civilian populations and the use of starvation as a weapon of war, protecting medical and humanitarian personnel and ensuring unimpeded access for humanitarian aid constitute the very essence of international humanitarian law.

All parties to an armed conflict, whether States or non-State actors, whether it is an inter-State or intra-State conflict, must respect that law. However, today's conflicts, almost without exception, have exacted a very high toll among civilians. We are concerned about the increasing number of attacks on hospitals and doctors in conflict areas. Such attacks contravene the basic norms of international humanitarian law. We are all aware of the very important work being carried out by organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Doctors without Borders. Spain, along with Egypt, New Zealand and Uruguay, is working on a specific initiative to provide medical assistance during armed conflicts, which we will submit to the Security Council as our contribution to ending such attacks, to ensuring that medical personnel, facilities and vehicles are protected and to ensuring access to medical services in situations of conflict. Spain also welcomes the adoption, last May, of resolution 2222 (2015), which took note of the threats and attacks against journalists. We recognize the very important role that journalists play in protecting civilians in times of conflict. During our presidency of the Security Council in December we will be celebrating the tenth anniversary of resolution 1728 (2006), giving us an excellent opportunity to continue to promote our efforts in this area.

Over the past several years, we have also seen an increasing trend in the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas, such as the use of barrel bombs in Syria, which has resulted in over 30,000 deaths this past year. Spain categorically condemns those actions. It is important that States express their support for an international commitment in order to put an end to the use of those explosive weapons in populated areas and better protect civilian populations in the future.

Such attacks against civilians are being carried out in an atmosphere of impunity, highlighting the absence of respect for international humanitarian law. Spain has actively supported the initiative of Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross with regard to strengthening compliance with the international humanitarian law. If the States involved do not want or are not able to bring to justice those responsible, we have a very important tool at our disposal — the International Criminal Court, which can ensure that

those crimes do not go unpunished. The Council has an important role to fulfil in referring cases to the Court, but today we are not filling that role. The failure to refer to the Court the situation in Syria, as well as to follow-up the two situations referred to it to date, namely, those in Darfur and in Libya, serve to cast doubt as to the real scope of our commitment to combat impunity. With regard to the responsibility to protect, we agree that protecting civilians falls mainly on the State. Nevertheless, when a State lacks the ability or will to do so, that responsibility is also shared by the international community, and specifically to the Security Council acting on its behalf.

Recognizing the importance of political solutions in preventing conflicts does not mean that urgent attention should not be provided to operational aspects of protecting civilians, as was highlighted in the report (see S/2015/446) of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations. In that regard, my country highly values the fact that the Secretary-General has stated in his report on the review of peacekeeping operations that a senior adviser on the protection of civilians should be established in all missions, with a specific mandate in that regard and located within the office of the Special Representative. Spain stands ready to fulfil its part in that joint effort at improving the efficiency of peacekeeping operations. With regard to the summit that took place in New York last September on peacekeeping operations, Spain was among the countries to assume new commitments to give peacekeeping operations means, including training aspects.

Furthermore, women and children suffer a disproportionate impact in conflicts. Spain will never tire of pointing out that all forms of violence against women and children increase during times of conflict. We are also weeing an alarming increase in efforts to systemize the use of sexual and gender violence in times of conflict. That is sometimes used not just as weapon of war, but also one of terror. The fact that, last June, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court stated that her office had received the largest number of allegations of sexual abuse in Darfur in connection with armed groups is but one example. Violence against women can also constitute a clear early indicator of an impending crisis. The protection of women depends on the prevention of conflicts, in addition to being necessary in stabilizing a country in armed conflict.

The global study on the review of resolution 1325 (2000) that was published last October also calls attention to the importance of women's participation in conflict resolution, particularly if a stable and lasting peace is the ultimate goal. Moreover, the violence committed against children in armed conflicts takes on many forms, such as abductions, forced recruitment, sexual abuse, illegal trafficking, slavery, mutilation and murder. We will also not tire of repeating the absolute importance of respecting the most fundamental rules of humanitarian law. Likewise, it is important that peace agreements clearly include the needs of children who are victims of conflicts — in the areas of protection, rehabilitation and reintegration. With regard to accountability, we will continue to advocate for the strengthening of national judicial systems and cooperation between the International Criminal Court and the Secretary Council. The fight against impunity will not only restore dignity to the victims, but it will also serve as deterrence.

I would like to conclude by thanking the President for having convened this most important debate, which adds new impetus to the fight against barbarism, which affects the most vulnerable populations. Spain remains resolutely committed to protecting civilians in particular, as well as to strengthening international humanitarian law in general.

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for his opening remarks at today's debate. I also listened carefully to the briefings made by the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of the representative of Oxfam.

Ukraine appreciates Uruguay's initiative to hold this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Ukraine continues to be fully committed to improving the protection of civilians in armed conflict. In particular, we fully support the attention given by the Council to the situation of women and children affected by armed conflict — an issue concerning which Ukraine has adopted specific political directives.

We highly appreciate the report of the Secretary-General of June 2015 (S/2015/433) on the protection of civilians and his report (S/2015/446) on the implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations. As stated in the reports, the reality on the ground continues to be characterized by a frequent lack of willingness on the part of the parties to armed conflict to fulfil their obligations to respect and protect civilians in

accordance with humanitarian law, human rights and the rights of refugees. We call upon all parties to armed conflict to fully assume their obligations.

Recent events make today's debate even more relevant. Only last Friday, the Security Council held an important meeting on the desperate humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.7505). That situation requires the adoption of measures to protect civilians, so as to save human lives. Ukraine fully shares the serious concern expressed by the Secretary-General in his reports on the situations in the Central African Republic, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Libya, Mali and other countries in which the civilian population, in particular women and children, continue to be targets of various forms of extreme violence, resulting in a grave humanitarian crisis and enormous displacement of the population.

In particular, we share the concern over the ongoing attacks directed against health care personnel, facilities and transport. We are also concerned about the increased threats against journalists in situations of armed conflict. We reaffirm our commitment to the conclusions that were drawn on that issue in the debate that took place last May at the initiative of Lithuania (see S/PV.7450). We fully support resolution 2223 (2015), which was adopted as a result of that debate.

With regard to humanitarian assistance, the parties to a conflict must do their utmost to ensure effective and timely access to humanitarian assistance, including cargo and materials. We continue to be very concerned about the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We must engage in greater international cooperation in order to establish stricter norms to protect civilians from the impact of explosive weapons in such areas. The protection of civilians is an obvious objective for the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations.

The success of a peacekeeping mission is often determined by its ability to protect civilians. At the same time, we recognize the need for fundamental reform aimed at further strengthening peacekeeping operations in order to respond to the evolving threats and security challenges of today. We must ensure that the missions have adequate resources and that due priority is given to civilian protection activities. The mandates should be realistic and not create false expectations. In return, we hope that the missions can ensure that those resources are utilized with maximum effectiveness for the protection of civilians. The strict application of a zero-tolerance policy with regard to peacekeeping forces is another vital and necessary element for the protection of civilians, particularly women and children, in conflict situations.

Ukraine also wishes to emphasize the need to provide peacekeeping missions with clear mandates to protect civilians. The clarity of those mandates is essential, but it is not enough. Three other key elements must be considered. They are strong operational control over peacekeeping mission activities, clear strategies for the troops and good working relationships between the peacekeeping missions and the humanitarian actors on the ground.

During this debate on the protection of civilians, I cannot remain silent on the issue of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which has claimed the lives of thousands of innocent civilians in many towns and cities in eastern Ukraine during the past two years. I wish to express gratitude to the Secretary-General for having highlighted the situation in the occupied areas of Ukraine in his June report (S/2015/453). The findings presented in that report with regard to the protection of civilians show that Ukrainian civilians have faced numerous challenges resulting from foreign military aggression. The bombing of Volnovakha, Mariupol and Kramatorsk by multiple-rocket-launch systems, known as Grad, Smerch and Uragan, has killed and wounded a great number of civilians, including children, thereby demonstrating the heinous crimes carried out by militants and irregular armed groups controlled by the Russian Federation directed against the civilian population. Given that those cities are far from the conflict zone, we can conclude that civilians were being deliberately bombed.

Those promoting the conflict are determined to make the lives of ordinary people impossible and to permanently block the activities of international and Ukrainian humanitarian organizations based on an illegal demand for the certification of those organizations. At the same time, so-called Russian humanitarian aid convoys are crossing the Ukrainian border without the consent of, or inspection by, the Ukrainian authorities and without coordination with the International Committee of the Red Cross. While the content of those convoys, essentially contraband since they can't be inspected, is largely unknown, the arrival of almost every convoy is followed immediately

by a new escalation of attacks by the separatists in the region.

While the situation in the occupied territories remains unstable, the Ukrainian Government is working hard to alleviate the suffering of the people affected; in particular, it has made every effort to increase social and security guarantees for internally displaced persons. The legislation on humanitarian aid has been considerably simplified so as to allow easier access to people in need. In the current difficult circumstances, the Ukrainian Government is doing everything possible to provide humanitarian assistance to the civilian populations in the occupied regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as to internally displaced persons. On 20 October 2014, the Parliament of Ukraine adopted a law on the rights and freedoms of internally displaced persons. At the same time, the Cabinet of Ministers is working to implement the State programme for the support, social adaptation and reintegration of Ukrainian citizens who were forced to flee from the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territory.

The protection of civilians in armed conflicts has become an increasingly complex challenge. Nevertheless, that complexity cannot be allowed to diminish in any way our collective efforts to effectively address the current horrific state of affairs in my country. Ukraine will continue to play a strong and active role in that process. We also express the sincere hope that those who have violated international humanitarian law will be brought to justice.

In conclusion, I wish to express my profound gratitude to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for its very fruitful cooperation in helping to meet the immediate needs of the internally displaced persons in Ukraine.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China appreciates Uruguay's initiative to hold this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and welcomes Uruguay's Vice-Minister for Foreign Affair to New York to preside over our meeting. I wish to thank Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson for his briefing, and I listened carefully to the statements by Ms. Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the representative of Oxfam.

Protecting civilians in armed conflict, especially women and children, has become an important part of the mandates of the relevant United Nations peacekeeping operations. The question of the safety and security of humanitarian workers has also attracted ever-greater attention on the part of the international community. China supports the international community in its efforts to take practical and effective measures to promote the effective protection of civilians in armed conflict. In that connection, I wish to emphasize the following four points.

First, all parties to an armed conflict should fulfil their responsibility to protect civilians. National Governments bear the primary responsibility for protecting innocent civilians from the harm caused by conflicts and wars. Conflicting parties should exactly follow international law and international humanitarian law, as well as the relevant Security Council resolutions, and commit themselves to protecting civilians. As for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed during armed conflicts, the countries concerned should investigate and punish such acts pursuant to those laws.

Secondly, it is necessary to strengthen conflict-prevention and resolution, so that civilians will not suffer from armed conflicts. The international community should pay great attention to resolving the root causes that breed conflicts and to easing tensions, controlling conflicts and lessening contradictions, realizing socioeconomic development and advancing inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation in order to try to create an environment of peace and stability. At the core of our collective security system, the Security Council should strengthen preventive diplomacy, prevent armed conflicts and curb their escalation. It should also work energetically to push for political settlements, so as to minimize the impact of armed conflicts on civilians.

Thirdly, in protecting civilians, peacekeeping operations should strictly abide by the mandates assigned to them by the Council, maintain objectivity and neutrality and avoid becoming a party to the conflicts. The implementation by peacekeeping operations of their mandates to protect civilians should be aimed at assisting the countries concerned in strengthening the protection of civilians, and it cannot replace the national Governments and parties to conflicts in their efforts to fulfil their responsibilities and obligations to protect civilians. In formulating protection-of-civilians mandates, the Council should take into consideration, in a comprehensive manner, the situation on the ground and the capacity and conditions

of peacekeeping missions, in order to ensure that the mandate is clear, realistic and achievable and provides sufficient and strong guarantees in terms of resources and equipment.

Fourthly, humanitarian relief operations in armed conflict should be carried out in an appropriate manner. All parties to conflict should strictly abide by their obligation to protect humanitarian workers and avoid attacking them or other acts that might harm them. In carrying out humanitarian relief operations in armed conflict, the United Nations and other international agencies should follow the Charter of the United Nations and the guiding principles on humanitarian relief operations, fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries concerned and work to enhance communication with the countries concerned and engage in dialogue and consultation with them on humanitarian access. All parties to armed conflict must ensure the timely access to assistance for affected civilians.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson; Ms. Eveline Rooijmans, Humanitarian Policy Advisor at Oxfam; and Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their statements and their commitment. I would also like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this essential meeting. This first open debate of 2016 on the protection of civilians has never seemed more timely and necessary. Permit me to underscore three points that will allow me to explain why.

First, the briefings we heard show that the protection of civilians is being tested as never before. The Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949, which is an integral part of international humanitarian law, was inspired by a draft preamble by the French and Finnish delegations, which was ultimately not retained, on "the eternal principles of that law which is the foundation and the safeguard of civilization". Evoking the protection of civilians in 2016 is to return to that origin at a time when the unbearable images of starving civilians come to us from the siege of Madaya. As we know, the regime is using the heinous tactics of siege and starvation there and in many other places. Those reprehensible acts must end in order for a dialogue among Syrians to begin. At the same time, in Syria, Daesh continues to carry out summary executions and abduct women and children. In the face of such unspeakable acts, France will always call for mobilization, as it did on Friday, during an open meeting on the situation of besieged cities in Syria (see S/PV.7605).

Sadly, it would take too long to recall all the dire situations in Yemen, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Lake Chad basin and in many other crises, but we must recall that the protection of civilians, which is above all the primary responsibility of each State, is neither a concession nor a favour by the parties concerned, but rather an absolute obligation. Attacks that deliberately or indiscriminately target civilians and medical and humanitarian personnel must be unconditionally put to an end in their various theatres.

Strengthening respect for international humanitarian law, where the protection of civilians is a key component, is at the heart of the thirty-second International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. France supported that initiative and would like to thank the Conference for its unwavering commitment throughout the four years of consultations among States. France reiterates its commitment to that issue and its willingness to actively continue with those consultations.

Secondly, bearing that in mind, I would like to emphasize that the protection of civilians remains for France both a moral commitment, but also something without which there can be no lasting peace and security. In is thus a key challenge for the Security Council. Let me give some examples, among many.

In Mali, the intervention of French forces, in coordination with African and Malian forces, helped to put an end to the jihadist stranglehold over the population. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali was then able to deploy with a robust mandate to protect civilians, which helped stabilize the country and restore the rule of law. In the Central African Republic, the intervention by the African-led International Support Mission for the Central African Republic, supported by French forces, helped avoid mass atrocities. France commends the efforts made by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, which provided its support to the creation of the Special Criminal Court and arrested persons suspected of serious crimes. Its mandate reflects its innovative approach to supporting essential action for France in its fight against impunity, namely, in the International Criminal Court. By contributing to the

stabilization of situations that remain fragile, its actions show the connection between the fight against impunity and the protection of civilians. France reiterates its support for the International Criminal Court in its task of trying the most serious crimes in places where the willingness or ability for justice to be served is lacking.

Thirdly, given those challenges, more than ever we must maintain the protection of civilians at the heart of the Security Council's agenda through an approach of constant improvement. The Secretary-General's plan of action for the protection of civilians and the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) have stressed that. Although we must never forget that the protection of civilians is a State responsibility, it is inseparable from peace. In that regard, France supports tangible action, such as strengthening the capacities for action of the human rights and protection of civilians components of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of early warning systems, the training of police and gendarme contingents and the list could go on. However, efforts will be effective only if peacekeeping is exemplary in practice and does not let down the people they are in charge of protecting. To that end, France fully supports the two priorities of the Secretary-General, the first of which is the zero-tolerance policy against sexual abuse and exploitation. Recent allegations of sexual abuse committed in the Central African Republic have shown that it is vital for the United Nations, as well as for contributing countries, to respond quickly and without concessions to the perpetrators of crimes if they are confirmed. France is determined, for its part, and within the framework of the ongoing legal proceedings, to shed light and impose exemplary penalties if necessary. With regard to the due diligence policy, the United Nations must be prepared to reassess its support for some armed forces when the protection of civilians is ignored and human rights violations have been proved. We also share the recommendation of the High-level Panel to strengthen the investigation and information efforts when a military or police mission fails in its protection mandate.

The year 2016 opens with immense challenges for the protection of civilians. We have to be specific and resolute in our pressure on the parties to enable true progress for the civilians on the ground in Syria and to reinvigorate the political process established by resolution 2254 (2015). With regard to our on presence on the ground, the Security Council mission is preparing to visit Burundi again to promote an inclusive inter-Burundian dialogue at a time when the worst tensions seem to be increasing at an alarming rate and the Arusha Accords must remain more than ever the guide for the actors concerned. We have to be specific and show resolve in ensuring the absolute protection that we owe to health and medical personnel and their facilities. This is also vital because since October 2015 three Médecins Sans Frontières facilities have been bombed in Yemen, as well as one of its hospitals in Kunduz, Afghanistan.

The protection of civilians, which is the priority concern of my statement, must, now more than ever, remain at the heart of the Council's priorities and its agenda in 2016. That is why we must take inspiration from the exemplary commitment, courage and professionalism of the International Committee of the Red Cross, non-governmental organizations like Médecins Sans Frontières and Oxfam, as well as so many other volunteers on the ground. The stakes are high and crucial in themselves. Similarly, the credibility of our entire Organization is at stake.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): Once again, I wish to welcome you to New York, Mr. President, and to congratulate you and the delegation of Uruguay on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the presence of the high-level representatives of Spain and Ukraine. Malaysia deems the convening of this open debate to be timely for the reasons outlined in the informative concept note (S/2016/22, annex) circulated by the presidency.

My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the briefers, namely, Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, International Committee of the Red Cross Vice-President Christine Beerli and the civil society representative, Ms. Eveline Rooijmans of Oxfam. Their briefings have brought much valuable insight to the topic at hand.

I also wish to associate my delegation with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Malaysia remains deeply concerned that the deliberate targeting of, and indiscriminate attacks against, civilians are increasingly common features of the situations and conflicts under consideration by the Council. The fact that incidents of deliberate attacks

against humanitarian actors, medical personnel and medical facilities in conflict zones have increased is particularly deplorable. The growing scale of such violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, coupled with the unprecedented levels of brutality and barbarism committed by parties to the various conflicts around the world, indicate the concerning trend of flagrant disregard for long-established humanitarian norms and standards. That recent level of impunity must not be left unchecked.

Civilians caught in conflict zones are subjected to added suffering and trauma through displacement and the denial of basic necessities. Women and children are particularly at risk from sexual and gender-based violence. The culture of impunity serves only to further poison the already toxic animosity of conflicts. There is no lack of international laws or other applicable norms to regulate the behaviour of States and non-State actors in conflict situations, particularly with regard to the protection of civilians. What is lacking is compliance with such standards by parties to the conflicts, on the one hand, and the necessary political will on the part of the international community, on the other, to decisively address threats to the safety and security of civilians. In that connection, we believe that the challenges outlined in the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) and the report (S/2015/682) of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel remain valid.

As the primary organ entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council has risen to the challenge by pursuing a robust normative agenda and framework for the protection of civilians. The Council's focus on thematic agendas, including the framework set up regarding civilian protection, particularly children in armed conflict and conflict-related sexual violence, reflect its commitment and resolve in that regard.

At the same time, we also wish to acknowledge the response shown by the United Nations system, particularly the fact that an increasing number of United Nations peace operations now include civilian-protection mandates. On that note, we fully endorse the view that, in mandating its peacekeepers with the obligation to ensure the protection of civilians, the United Nations must ensure that peacekeepers are adequately trained and equipped and receive the necessary logistical and technological support to enable them to carry out the mandated tasks effectively. My delegation takes this opportunity to pay tribute to the brave men and women who risk their lives daily to uphold and promote that important mandate. In line with the principles of inclusivity and national ownership, we also see value in the Secretary-General's recommendations with regard to expanding the involvement of local communities and non-governmental organizations, as well as enhancing the role of unarmed protection actors in implementing civilian-protection mandates.

For the past five years or so, the Council and the international community have been seized of the deteriorating situation in Syria. In that time the Council has taken certain innovative steps to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches civilian populations, including through the adoption of resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014). In that regard, my delegation has noted the proposals by Spain and New Zealand concerning the issue of medical neutrality, which, as we understand it, seeks to ensure that the principle of neutrality extends to the medical personnel and facilities that provide critical services in conflict situations. We believe that those proposals constitute an important and particularly relevant initiative with the potential for broader application and implementation across conflict situations. Malaysia stands ready to work closely with Spain and other Council members towards the realization of such an outcome. That serves as a response to the United Kingdom's call for concrete action.

In conclusion, Malaysia wishes to reaffirm its belief that the vigour with which the Council pursues the protection of civilians in conflict must hold true for all situations. In that regard, we wish to recall and highlight the plight of civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories, who seem to be perceived as being less than worthy of protection by the Council. Palestine and its people cannot remain the Council's Achilles heel indefinitely. Malaysia reiterates its call for United Nations protection of the occupied Palestinian territory, in line with international humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions. Such protection would go a long way towards ending impunity in the occupied territory and towards peace and security in the region, pending a final comprehensive settlement aimed at ending the Israeli occupation. The Council must send a clear message that impunity must cease and that all parties, including State and non-State

actors, should be held accountable for violations of international humanitarian law.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank the President and Uruguay for its leadership on the issue of the protection of civilians, both here in the Security Council by convening this debate and also in peacekeeping, where Uruguay has played such a strong regional and international role. I thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Beerli and Ms. Rooijmans for their briefings. Let me offer my profound respect and admiration for the heroic, lifesaving work that Oxfam and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as their volunteers, perform every day in Syria and in other conflict-areas around the world.

Last Thursday, the UNICEF representative in Syria, Ms. Hanna Singer, managed to penetrate into the besieged area of Madaya and was brought to the basement of a makeshift hospital. Two teenage boys were sharing a bed. Singer recalled that their bodies were skeleton-like. A UNICEF doctor approached one of the teenagers, a 16 year-old named Ali. He looked particularly weak. When the doctor checked his pulse, it turned out there was none. The doctors started trying to resuscitate him, but saw that it was hopeless. According to Singer's account, given to Agence France Presse, the other young man lying next to him became frantic: "Did he die? Did he die?" he asked. Ali's family, themselves malnourished and sitting nearby, wept silently. They did not even have the energy to wail aloud upon realizing that their boy had died.

Ali was one of at least 35 people who have starved to death in the town of Madaya since 1 December, eight of them in the past nine days alone. Um Sultan, a resident of Madaya, told Amnesty International,

> "Every day, I hear that someone is sick and unable to leave their bed. My husband is now one of them. He can't leave his bed, and when he does, he faints. I don't recognize him any more; he is skin and bones. I have asked for help with food, but no one can help. We are all in the same mess."

Convoys of food and medical assistance were just recently permitted to reach the 40,000 people suffering in Madaya and the 20,000 people besieged by armed opposition groups in Fu'ah and Kafraya. Evacuations of some of the hundreds of people reportedly near death have finally begun. It goes without saying that this is absurdly overdue. These aid convoys must continue these evacuations; they must be urgently allowed to proceed, but, above all, the sieges, the daily sieges of these communities, must be lifted. I speak of Madaya as others have done today because the crisis there is far from over for the people living there. As we enter the United Nations today, all of us, we experience the first truly bitter cold day of the winter. Now imagine burning the wooden fixtures and fittings in one's home for some respite from that bitter winter. Imagine burning plastic, as those who have run out of wood to burn have started to do. Imagine surviving for weeks on leaves and grass and then imagine winter coming and taking with it the leaves and grass on which you relied. Imagine being the mother or the father of a teenage boy like Ali, and watching your child die without the means of helping him or her.

We have to try to put ourselves here in the shoes of others. We have to. These families love like our families love. They are human beings, and they need us to do more than we have done up to this point. They need the medical evacuations that the United Nations has asked for, which are being agreed to at a trickle. That is unacceptable. There are 15 besieged areas: two of them besieged by armed opposition groups; one besieged by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL); and the rest, 12 of the 15 besieged areas, besieged by a Member State of the United Nations. Think of that. The United Nations was created to prevent crimes against humanity, to prevent atrocities, to prevent images of emaciated children and civilians from being projected out of areas in need. Twelve of 15 by a Member State of the United Nations.

Now I speak of Madaya also because it exemplifies what this debate is about. It reminds us of the human stakes when we talk about the protection of civilians. And it shows why we have to talk about the protection of civilians regardless of whether or not peacekeepers are deployed in a particular area. And it reminds us, above all, of the growing disregard for granting humanitarian access, which used to be a principle that was observed as a general rule, even though there were always exceptions, the disregard for international humanitarian law and, most fundamentally and most disturbingly, the apparent disregard for human life. That is what we are dealing with — a numbing that would allow people to inflict that kind of harm willfully on civilians and on children.

More than 4 million Syrians now live in areas where the United Nations struggles to deliver assistance. Time and again the Syrian regime has promised to

uphold its most basic responsibilities to its citizens. Time and again it has agreed to allow lifesaving aid to reach starving people, and time and again the Syrian regime has failed to follow through. Throughout last year, Damascus did not even bother to respond to more than half of United Nations requests to deliver assistance across conflict lines. And those coutries in the United Nations that have influence over the Syrian regime, who are partnering with it now in the conflict, who are coming in some places to its rescue, please use that influence to get it, in the first instance, to respond to United Nations requests and, above all, to grant those requests. The United Nations estimates that if the regime approved the outstanding requests — the requests outstanding just today — 1.4 million people would receive assistance.

It bears stressing that, while we have all rightly talked about the use of starvation as a weapon of war here today, that use of food as a weapon of war is happening right alongside other horrific tactics — barrel bombs, chemical weapons use and systematic torture against civilians by the regime, and, of course, when it comes to ISIL, some of the most barbaric and gruesome tactics that we have ever seen employed, including the use of children to execute their parents, including the summoning of civilians, as we saw over the weekend in Deir ez-Zor, with somewhere between 100 and 300 people executed in cold blood, and the sexual enslavement of women like Nadia, whom we heard from in December at our meeting on human trafficking. Where is the sanctity of life? Where is the respect for the human dignity of the person in conflict today? Yemen, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Burundi — the list goes on and on. Civilians are not just going unprotected, but often are coming under deliberate attack.

Let me briefly suggest three areas in which we — and by we I mean the Security Council, the United Nations and we each as Member States — can and must seek immediate improvements.

The first should be straightforward. It is on the transmission of information. When United Nations staff leaders and experts, or when any of us as Member States through our partners on the ground, recognize looming threats or anticipate potential crises, they or we must immediately inform the Council. When something shocks the conscience of someone who works for a non-governmental organization or for the United Nations or for a Member State, come forward again, jump up and down, sound the alarm. The Council must also hear immediately from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) when peacekeeping contingents that are tasked with protecting civilians do not fulfil that component of their mandate. As has been documented, that happens too often. In that instance, we in the Council can try to use our leverage, our leverage in capital in terms of our bilateral ties and our leverage as a Council, to ensure that appropriate action is taken.

Building upon the Secretary-General's implementation report on the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/682), DPKO should also work to more systematically bring to the Council's attention the most pressing protection challenges and strategies needed to address them. Shine the spotlight back on us, rather than internalizing the constraints that may well exist; put it back on the Council, where it belongs.

The second area is peacekeeping performance and accountability. With nearly all peacekeepers now mandated to protect civilians, they represent one of our most powerful tools in this effort, even if they cannot be, and are not, everywhere. It is incumbent upon the Council to ensure that all contingents are appropriately prepared and sufficiently trained and equipped, and that they are held accountable if they fail to uphold their mandate.

From the outset, we must ensure that the mission planning process takes full account of the protection of civilians. This priority should inform strategy development and resource allocation. We must also ensure that the troops being deployed are adequately prepared. Others have touched upon the importance of the Kigali Principles, and we share the appreciation for the initiative taken by Rwanda. The United States is prioritizing support for troop-contributing countries that have committed to the Kigali Principles, or who have otherwise demonstrated a commitment to fully implementing mission mandates. Once deployed, the United Nations leadership must be prepared to replace any contingents that are not effectively protecting civilians, and certainly also any that would harm civilians, including through sexual exploitation and abuse. The additional 50,000 soldiers and police pledged at the September peacekeeping summit gives the United Nations new choices and the ability to replace failing units. This option must be exercised, and, in that regard, we welcome the United Nations decision to remove the Democratic Republic of the Congo peacekeepers from

the Central African Republic, as an important signal of zero tolerance on abuse. Full accountability is needed across that and other missions for all the allegations that have surfaced.

Thirdly, and finally, this Council and this Organization must also recognize that its responsibility for the protection of civilians is not limited to those countries hosting peacekeeping missions. From Madaya to Burundi, when civilians come under threat, the Council must consider every appropriate action at its disposal. We may disagree on what the perfect tool is, but we must agree that we need to open the toolbox and try to put as many tools in place as have a chance at achieving influence. That could include sustained bilateral pressure, the development of mediation and peacekeeping options, and the consideration of sanctions against those who are perpetrators or organizers of attacks against civilians — or attacks against peacekeepers.

We need to think of how many peacekeepers were attacked in 2015 and ask how many of those who attacked United Nations peacekeepers — the very people sent by the Security Council — were ever held accountable, ever. And we need to look at that record over a decade. The answer is a show of the impunity that the perpetrators of attacks against peacekeepers feel, and we can imagine, if that is the case for those coming from Member States of the United Nations sent by the Council, what it is like for the average civilian who has been attacked.

We can also increase, as I think we have been doing lately, Security Council engagement with regional organizations, consistent with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. Individual Member States, each with its particular bilateral relationships and capabilities, must also consider all the relevant tools in our respect toolboxes.

Member States and all parts of the United Nations must also embrace the Secretary-General's Human Rights up Front initiative, which means recognizing once and for all that mainstreaming human rights across the Organization is not a luxury, it is a necessity. It is not something that is nice to do, as some Member States and some within the Organization have suggested, it is an absolute need — if we are serious about protecting civilians.

In conclusion, today's open debate is an opportunity to discuss how to better protect civilians, which is an urgently needed conversation. But through it I hope we also send an equally urgent message: no matter how frequent, heinous or blatant the assaults on civilians, whether in Syria or elsewhere, the Security Council will never accept them as the new normal, as somehow inevitable. Starving civilians, burning villages, sexually enslaving women: these are not the costs of war or the inevitable consequences of war; these are heinous, wilful, barbaric acts. They are the acts that the Organization was created to prevent. The Council must remain committed to combating them. It must do more to combat them. We must do better at ensuring accountability for those who inflict harm upon civilians or those tasked with aiding civilians.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): I welcome the President of the Security Council back to New York. We congratulate Uruguay on organizing today's debate. I also want to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Christine Beerli of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Ms. Eveline Rooijmans of Oxfam for their briefings.

As others have said, the grim context for our discussions today is a world in which civilians in conflict are at greater risk now than at any time in the Organization's history. Today's meeting is a chance to talk frankly about the challenge of protecting civilians as well as how the Security Council is meeting that challenge. The protection of civilians has been included as a separate thematic item on the Council's agenda since 1999. We recognize the normative value of this process and the significant effort invested in carrying the discussion forward. But after more than 15 years of reports, debates, thematic resolutions and presidential statements, we have to acknowledge that the on-the-ground conditions that bear on the real life circumstances of civilians in conflict zones are still dreadful.

In New Zealand's view, the Council's focus on the protection of civilians must shift from words to actions towards making a meaningful improvement in the protection of real people in real life situations. I want to highlight three areas in which we consider that the Council needs to translate its rhetoric into reality.

As we often say in the Chamber, preventing conflict is far preferable to dealing with its consequences. Yet this reality is recognized fitfully at best by the Council, which regularly resists taking action before real trouble starts, even when the warning signs are apparent. For

over six months, New Zealand has been calling on the Council to address the growing risk of conflict in Burundi. We are pleased that agreement has at last been reached and that a Council mission is departing for Bujumbura tomorrow. It is important that the Council listen as well as speak to the Burundian parties. We need the Government and opposition to commit to reversing the current slide into conflict and to undertake inclusive and meaningful reconciliation efforts.

We believe the Council can do much better in developing nimble and pragmatic responses to emerging and re-emerging conflict risks, in cooperation with regional partners. A clear case in point is the Democratic Republic of Congo, where elections are scheduled later this year. We know that violence has accompanied past elections. We know the uncertainties around the coming elections and the tensions to which they are giving rise. The Council, in consultation with the African Union, needs to start thinking now about how to engage the Democratic Republic to address these risks and how to respond if the situation goes awry.

In the area of peace operations, countless lives are saved by the presence and actions of United Nations peacekeepers, and we pay tribute to the skill and courage of United Nations personnel in carrying out this vital role. But, as others have noted, we can do more to ensure that protection-of-civilians mandates are implemented more effectively.

Mandates need to be clear, realistic and adequately resourced. They need to be crafted and adjusted to changing circumstances. They need to take into account the views of troop- and police-contributing countries. Over the past year, New Zealand has promoted more meaningful engagement among the Council, the Secretariat and troop- and police-contributing countries on mandate formation and renewal, prefiguring the triangular consultations called for in the report (see S/2015/446) of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations. In our view, such consultations should be a more consistent feature in Council practice. Their value was recognized in the December presidential statement adopted upon the initiative of Chad (S/PRST/2015/26).

Last March, the Council adopted New Zealand's proposal for regular informal Secretariat briefings to keep the Council informed of key developments in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That was a positive step that could usefully be applied to other high-risk situations on the Council's agenda, particularly those involving protection mandates.

Current decision-making lacks the situational awareness that comes from real-time, high-quality information on emerging risks and ongoing implementation challenges. While the Council is not the body to make operational decisions about the disposition of peacekeeping forces, we do need a better appreciation of the risks and threats facing peacekeepers and the civilians they are seeking to protect. This is an obvious area for improvement and one in which we will continue to press for greater openness.

Effective protection means ensuring civilians have access to essential humanitarian assistance as required by international humanitarian law. This has been the focus of efforts led first by Australia, Luxembourg and Jordan, and then New Zealand, Jordan and Spain, to try to improve humanitarian access to civilians in Syria, particularly in besieged and hard-to-access areas. Resolution 2258 (2015), adopted unanimously last month, gave particular attention to this question.

Regular reports from Madaya, Fu'ah and Kefraya have graphically shown the failures of the Syrian Government and armed opposition groups with respect to their people and their responsibilities under international law. We are encouraged that desperately needed access and aid have at last gotten through to these towns over the past week. It is imperative that they be allowed to continue and that similar unimpeded access is allowed to the 14 other Madayas across Syria.

We are deeply disturbed by the reports of brutality on the part of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in Deir ez-Zor, and would welcome further information on this episode from the Secretariat. In addition to access difficulties, as the Secretary-General has highlighted, attacks on health-care personnel, health-care facilities and medical vehicles are also occurring in many of the conflicts on the Council's agenda. These are further contraventions of international humanitarian law that demand attention. New Zealand and Spain, together with Egypt, Uruguay and others, intend to take forward an initiative aimed at increasing practical protection for health care in situations of armed conflict.

It is axiomatic that United Nations personnel cannot be a threat to the civilians they are mandated to protect. Yet we continue to hear reports of sexual

abuse and exploitation against populations traumatized already by appalling conflict situations.

We acknowledge the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance approach to sexual exploitation and abuse, and we commend him for making good on his undertaking to require the removal of contingents that continue to transgress and whose Governments fail to take effective enforcement and remedial action. The Council must be kept informed of the steps taken, both to prosecute alleged offenders and to require contributing countries to account for the performance of their personnel.

Finally, I thank the Secretary-General for his annual report on the protection of civilians. New Zealand looks forward to discussing with Council members the next annual report later this year and how we can ensure that it is considered in a structured and timely manner and that we respond appropriately.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, the delegation of Senegal warmly welcomes the initiative taken by your country to convene this important open debate, which gives us an opportunity to reiterate our deep collective commitment to the protection of civilian populations in times of armed conflict. The fact that you yourself, Mr. Vice-Minister, have travelled to New York to preside over the debate is to be commended. The Senegalese delegation also wishes to congratulate Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson; Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Ms. Eveline Rooijmans, Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor at Oxfam.

The bleak picture painted by the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2015/453) reminds us that despite the progress achieved in the normative field, the struggle for the effective protection of civilians in armed conflict is far from having been won. The truth is that the strong support of the international community for the relevant legal instruments and mechanisms is, sadly, far from having become translated into action on the ground, where the realities remain very troubling. What is therefore required is a genuine mobilization and greater proactivity on the part of the Council to ensure a more effective protection of civilians in general and of women and children in particular.

In that respect, the Security Council must increase its vigilance and its efforts to ensure respect by all parties to conflict, Governments as well as non-State actors, for their obligations under international law with regard to the protection of civilians.

The Senegalese delegation believes that prevention and mediation are the least costly approaches, including in terms of loss of human life, to ensure the protection of civilians, and that the promotion of a lasting peace is the most sustainable way of creating such an environment. Prevention must be based on a system of rapid analysis and early warning, allowing us to carry out more nimble actions.

In that respect, strengthened cooperation with regional and subregional organizations, which tend to have a better understanding of the factors involved in a conflict and of local socioeconomic dynamics, as well as the involvement of political, religious and community leaders, can have a positive impact on the protection of civilians. Cooperation with the non-governmental organizations deployed in conflict areas also seems essential to us.

In any event, the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, must play a vital role in this respect, as it bears primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and therefore for protecting human security throughout the world. That is why the Council's actions should focus more sharply on the creation of a genuine culture of prevention of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. Concerning the fight against impunity, the existing criminal Tribunals, especially the International Criminal Court, must be strongly supported in that respect.

The Council has an array of tools ranging from preventive deployment to the dispatch of peacekeeping or peacebuilding forces. The report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) highlights the fact that United Nations peacekeeping operations contribute significantly to protecting, on a daily basis, thousands of civilians through the monitoring and upholding of human rights; their physical presence; deterrence and protection measures; and support for the development of the rule of law, in a context of political engagement with the parties to a conflict.

At the operational level, peacekeepers should be provided the means and capacities required to properly and effectively implement their mandates, particularly given the fact that missions are being deployed to increasingly hostile and demanding environments,

which, naturally, can make the implementation of their obligations difficult in terms of providing protection.

Senegal has adopted a number of provisions in the framework of the protection of civilians, on which I will elaborate.

First, Senegal began very early the process of the harmonization of its national legal framework with the relevant international standards, and has also adopted a national strategy for the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations.

The 2016 action plan of the Chiefs of Staff of the Senegalese armed forces, which is geared towards training troops in the area of the rights and protection of civilians, states: "Within and beyond national borders, the Senegalese armed forces have a duty not to perpetrate abuses. Moreover, they must be protective of vulnerable groups such as women and children". In other words, the protection of civilians in theatres of deployment is a pre-eminent reason for the presence of Senegalese troops. Senegal's support for the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians is part of the same dynamic.

To give shape to this vision, my country has committed to bolstering the capacities of its armed forces in the field of armed-conflict law by placing the emphasis on training and the planning and conduct of operations, with the goal of allowing Senegalese men and women involved in armed conflict, at whatever level, to be more familiar with and, above all, strictly to discharge their obligations under international humanitarian law.

I should like to give two examples of the actions taken by the Senegalese security and defence forces. First, the Senegalese security and defence forces maintain ongoing cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which has allowed army schools and training centres to receive education on international humanitarian law, which is regularly provided under the auspices of the ICRC. Two teacher-training seminars were held in 2012 and 2014, respectively, for some 30 Senegalese officers, and conference cycles geared to peacekeeping contingents have been drawn up for the next year.

A second example is the close cooperation of the Senegalese armed forces with the Save the Children non-governmental organization, which has resulted in, inter alia, the creation, at the level of Chiefs of Staff, of a committee — the Child Rights and Protection Section — responsible for the implementation and coordination of troop-training activities in the area of the rights and protection of children before, during and after conflicts. The second outcome of the collaboration with Save the Children was the adoption of a plan of action for 2016 to train officers about the rights and protection of children.

With regard to punishments that could be imposed, a range of strict disciplinary measures has been envisaged in the event of confirmed violations of international humanitarian law — violence, abuse, rape, et cetera — by one or more members of the Senegalese armed forces. Those measures include imprisonment for high-level military officers; the arrest of non-commissioned officers and officers; repatriation; disciplinary action with the possibility of dismissal; or trial before a civil and/or military tribunal. In any event, for the Senegalese armed forces, information and training in international humanitarian law are major priorities based on the pursuit of two goals. The first is to comply with our legal texts and our international obligations; the second is to protect the image of our army, the professionalism and republican character of which are recognized around the world.

All of that contributes to the implementation by my country of the zero-tolerance policy. The notion of the "army-nation" is the ideal of the Senegalese armed forces, whose motto is "They may kill us, but they cannot dishonour us". That ideal and motto were embodied to the highest degree by the courageous late Captain Mbaye Diagne, who, throughout his professional career, embodied the ideal of the protection of citizens, sadly at the cost of his life. After many dangerous missions, the late Captain Mbaye Diagne lost his life during the genocide in Rwanda in his efforts to save hundreds of unprotected, innocent people from certain death. In recognition and in memory of that late Senegalese officer, the United Nations took the historic decision to establish the Captain Mbaye Diagne Medal for Exceptional Courage, which is awarded each year to men and women who, like him, have distinguished themselves in the various theatres of engagement by their commendable commitment to the vulnerable. In 2015 the medal was not awarded owing to a lack of deserving candidates. It is that model of the late Captain Mbaye Diagne that the Senegalese delegation would like to offer to peacekeepers, Blue Helmets, wherever their noble duty calls them, so that they, as

United Nations forces, may be able to call upon and be deserving of the necessary trust of the populations of the countries in which they serve. That trust underpins peacekeeping, strengthens social ties and alleviates the tensions born of conflict that are inherent to all life in society.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of Uruguay for having taken the initiative to organize this important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and for having prepared the concept note to inform our discussion (see S/2016/22, annex). I would also like to express our appreciation to Mr. José Luis Cancela, Vice-Minister for External Relations of Uruguay, for presiding over this debate. And I thank Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor of Oxfam for their briefings.

The conflicts in the world today and the plight of civilians, in particular in the Middle East and Africa, are unprecedented; they challenge us in our efforts to enforce the principle of the responsibility to protect civilians in conflict, in particular the most vulnerable groups, including women and children. The urgency of that issue is perhaps best illustrated by the atrocities suffered by civilians in Syria as a result of the conflict that has been taking place there for the past five years, as well as the violations suffered by the Palestinian people, who have been subjected to occupation for more than 60 years.

The protection of such groups falls within the purview of the Security Council. Many United Nations meetings have been held to discuss the concept of the protection of civilians. In that respect, it is worth noting the Human Rights Council resolutions proposed by Egypt and adopted by that Council in 2011 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. That issue falls within the scope of the Security Council, which is why the protection of civilians at imminent risk has become part of the mandates of peacekeeping operations. Fifteen years have passed since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), and yet the optimum way for peacekeeping operations to implement their mandates with regard to the protection of civilians remains unclear. United Nations States Members have yet to reach consensus on the scope and feasibility of the use of force by peacekeeping operations to protect civilians.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was given an active mandate that included an unprecedented military component in the form of the Intervention Brigade. Although there were some successes, the mandate failed to provide sufficient protection for civilians in that country, who continue to suffer atrocities at the hands of armed groups.

In South Sudan, the United Nations provided for the direct protection of civilians in United Nations compounds; however, the direct protection method, despite being a moral necessity, is very costly and unsustainable. It also does not provide protection to the hundreds of thousands of civilians who are at risk outside those compounds, a group that continues to grow in number.

Egypt stresses that peacekeeping operations are but one tool for the protection of civilians. They are not necessarily the optimal or most effective way to address the risks faced by civilians. In that respect, we stress that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians lies with the country concerned and that the objective of peacekeeping operations is to enhance the capacity of States to fulfil their obligations.

Peacekeeping missions should respect the principles of sovereignty and national ownership and the cultural specificity of the host countries. Furthermore, the effective protection of civilians in armed conflict should not be limited to physical or bodily protection. It should also focus on providing political solutions to end conflict and prevent its recurrence, and should address the root causes of the conflict. We should adopt a more comprehensive approach that addresses poverty and socioeconomic marginalization, and enhances the role of the national institutions and mechanisms concerned with the prevention and management of conflicts, in particular the justice and security sector. That is perhaps the most important message to take away from the report (see S/2015/446) of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations and the report (see S/2015/490) of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture. In the future, more attention should be paid to the emerging challenges faced by civilians, first and foremost international terrorism.

In conclusion, success in implementing the principle of protecting civilians in armed conflicts hinges on achieving global consensus on the concept.

It has to be based on relevant concepts and frameworks that gain broad consensus here at the United Nations without addressing any controversial concepts.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are honoured to see a brother Latin American country presiding over the Security Council. We take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the way in which your country has been conducting the affairs of the Council during the month of January and for having convened today's important debate. We welcome the briefings made by Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, Ms. Eveline Rooijmans, Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor of Oxfam, and Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross. We acknowledge and congratulate the briefers on the outstanding relief work they carry out worldwide.

In accordance with the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977, civilians and people who do not take part in combat cannot, under any circumstances, be victims of attacks or violence. Particular attention should be paid to children, women, the elderly, people with disabilities and displaced persons. Unfortunately, in many of today's armed conflicts, the loss of life among civilians far exceeds that among combatants. Civilians who are in the midst of armed conflict require protection, in particular when those involved in the conflict are terrorist groups that operate outside the agreed norms and conventions of international law. The level of brutality and pure disregard for human life and dignity that we see today in many conflicts in which terrorist groups are involved — especially in the Middle East and in Africa — is alarming. Groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), Boko Haram and the Al-Nusrah Front indiscriminately target civilians. They torture, kidnap, disappear and recruit civilians by force, driving them from their homes, separating them from their families and denying them access to the most basic human rights. The human cost of such actions is devastating over time.

Venezuela condemns the siege against civilians in the armed conflict in Syria, regardless of who the perpetrators might be. We call attention in particular to the situations in Madaya, Kafraya and Fu'ah, which constitute serious violations of international humanitarian law. However, the conflict in Syria is brutal and the main enemy is terrorism, which continues to show contempt for human life. One example of such contempt was the attack perpetrated in August last year in Palmyra, when ISIS forces entered the city, killed all of the prisoners, murdered eminent archeologist and 81-year-old Khaled al-Asaad, and destroyed world heritage sites. Another example was the attack in Deyr ez-Zour last Saturday, when ISIS forces entered the city and murdered 300 people, most of them women, children and the elderly, simply because they were relatives of Syrian combatants.

Those examples serve to highlight the complete lack of humanity with which that terrorist organization operates and the threat to people under their siege. No one, no civilian, is safe from the demented violence perpetrated by ISIS and other terrorist groups. We must therefore work together and act decisively to eliminate the scourge. This new phenomenon means that the Security Council must adjust the mechanisms it uses to protect civilians.

The number of persons who have been displaced as a result of conflict is at its highest since the Second World War. It is estimated that 38 million people are displaced within their own countries, and 19.5 million people live as refugees abroad. In the case of Afghanistan, there were more civilian casualties in 2014 than in any other year since 2009. In Iraq, the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance stands at 8.2 million. In Libya, violent confrontations between armed groups and militias has had a disproportionate impact on children. More than 400,000 people have been displaced from their homes and hundreds of thousands do not have access to humanitarian aid.

Israeli attacks against the Palestinian population in Gaza in 2014 left more than 1,500 Palestinians dead, 500 of them children, and more than 1,100 injured. Five hundred thousand Palestinians were displaced from their homes and tens of thousands had their homes and livelihoods deliberately destroyed. The case of Palestine continues to weigh on the conscience of the Security Council because it is the most irrefutable situation illustrating the need for civilian protection — this, the long-standing Israeli occupation of the territories of the Palestinian people.

In the conflict in Yemen, it is estimated that up to 15.9 million people — 60 per cent of the population — are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

In Syria, the number of displaced persons stands at 6.6 million, while over 4.6 million civilians are living as refugees.

In the Central African Republic, between 6,000 and 10,000 children have been recruited by armed militias in the past year, more than a fifth of the population has been displaced and 430,000 refugees live in neighbouring countries.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2.8 million people have been displaced and almost 450,000 are living as refugees.

Wherever we look, we see an alarming and devastating, crushing reality that requires our attention and decisive action.

When United Nations peacekeeping operations are present in conflict areas, they could play a key role in protecting civilians — all the while acting impartially to ensure their own safety and complying with their mandate, and with the consent of the host State. Strategies that do not involve the use of weapons must be at the forefront of United Nations efforts to protect civilians. Peacekeeping operations, as inherently political tools, can protect civilians more effectively and help build trust among the parties, ending conflicts and facilitating peace agreements. The quest for a political solution must guide the planning, deployment and withdrawal of United Nations peacekeeping operations on the ground.

In addition, peacekeeping operations are committed to starting an open and impartial discussion with all the parties to a conflict in an effort to explore all other options that can be used as alternatives to violence, thereby promoting respect among all actors on the ground, regardless of their political ideology, ethnicity, religion or military affiliation. Humanitarian organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, play a fundamental role in that regard. The Organization's success with the strategies that do not involve the use of weapons in the protection of civilians depends on, to some extent, on its ability to forge strong alliances with such actors and work closely with local communities. Many non-governmental, national and international organizations that are committed to using strategies that do not involve the use of weapons to protect civilians are also working assiduously on the ground.

In that regard, the United Nations should make use of such important resources, paying attention to the practices and capabilities of local communities and humanitarian organizations on the ground to create an environment that is conducive to the protection of civilians. Likewise, the Security Council and the Secretariat must step up efforts to start inclusive and substantive consultations with troop- and police-contributing countries, ensuring that they fully participate in the tasks of planning and implementing mandates. We stress that such consultations should take place at the highest level, including with specialized personnel, experts and senior military officials in capitals in all operational phases of peacekeeping missions.

In addition to the actions I have already mentioned, peacekeeping operations can also make an important contribution to protecting civilians by acting as deterrents. A mission's presence on the ground plays an important role in that regard. Military patrols and the deployment troops constitute one of the most tangible guarantees of security that can be offered to local communities.

All the activities I have just described, as a whole, can contribute significantly to the protection of civilians. However, in situations where the civilian population is under the imminent threat of attack, peacekeeping troops must always be ready to act assertively. Accordingly, they must always have the forces, equipment and necessary training to deal with those situations.

In conclusion, the reality is that, as long as our Organization continues to devote insufficient political attention and resources to prevention and greater attention and resources to respond to crises — while, once again, giving little in the way of political attention and resources to the reconstruction and recovery phase of States — we will be failing those civilians who are suffering from the brunt of the violence. We must move beyond the status quo and focus all our efforts on preventing conflicts in the first place and ensuring they do not recur.

The Security Council must focus more on preventing conflicts rather than on fanning them. It should refrain from getting involved in them in pursuit of the national positions of its members. The Council should ensure the inviolability of the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations. The conflicts in Iraq,

Libya, Syria and Yemen have become veritable human tragedies linked to the collapse of States, the use of terrorism to overthrow Governments and the violation of the principles of non-interference and respect for sovereignty. The Security Council must increase its focus on a political solution to those conflicts as the most effective way of protecting civilians, who are caught up in them.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola): I thank you, Mr. President, for coming back to New York. We welcome you here. I also thank the Uruguayan presidency for having convened this open debate on the critical issue of the protection of civilians.

We align ourselves with the statements to be delivered by the Permanent Observer of the African Union and by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We also thank Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson for his briefing and recommendations, as well as Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Eveline Rooijmans, Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor of Oxfam for their respective briefings and for bringing to the Council accounts of real situations that we sometimes just discuss here. They have brought those situations closer to us within this Chamber, which is an important thing.

Angola shares the view that protection is the most effective tool in addressing potential conflict situations. States bear the responsibility for the protection of their civilian populations. The international community has a subsidiary but very important role to play in addressing the very serious problem of threats against civilians in armed conflicts. Let us also be clear that the responsibility-to-protect agenda, on which the protection of civilians is based, should not be used for agendas that run contrary to the very concept of the protection of civilians.

According to the latest report (S/2015/453) of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians, by the end of 2014 the number of internally displaced persons had reached a record breaking more than 38 million, owing to conflicts and violence, while 30 million had sought refuge abroad. Those numbers were surpassed in 2015, with approximately 59.5 million refugees, internally displaced persons or asylum-seekers throughout the world. According the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, in 2015 more than 950,000 refugees arrived in Europe through the Mediterranean Sea alone, fleeing war and violence in their countries. That has also been referred to several times during our debate this morning.

The sheer brutality and disregard for human life and dignity characterize today's conflicts. Massive human rights violations and abuse continue to occur in a context of widespread insecurity and neglect for international humanitarian law and human rights law. Civilians are killed both via targeted and indiscriminate attacks. They are tortured, maimed, taken hostage, forcibly recruited into armed groups or simply vanish. People are expelled from their homes, separated from their families and denied access to their most basic needs. Despite the establishment of a robust normative framework by the Security Council, the United Nations and other international bodies, the fact that the protection of civilians features in various resolutions and presidential statements of the Security Council, and despite the strengthening of protection in peacekeeping operations, human rights mandates have not been translated into significant improvements where conflicts are rampant.

Angola stresses the primacy of international law in this regard — namely, the 1949 Fourth Geneva Conventions and, in particular, the Fourth Geneva Convention, and its Additional Protocols — and yjr standards set out in international legal instruments on human rights.

Pertaining to the subject matter under consideration, we are particularly concerned with three critical issues.

First, humanitarian access remains a key challenge in many situations of armed conflict, along with worrying practices of obstructing the delivery of assistance as a tactic of war, which puts additional strain on civilians. Attacks against humanitarian workers and civilian facilities, such as schools and hospitals, and depriving civilians of basic needs constitute violations of international humanitarian law, which we also utterly condemn.

Secondly, the brutalizing of civilians, the targeting of civilian infrastructure and lack of accountability have become an endemic feature in ongoing conflicts, further aggravating the plight of civilian populations. It is disturbing how such violations of international law meet with widespread impunity, while victims are

deprived of any semblance of justice — a situation that must not be allowed to prevail.

Thirdly, the widespread use of explosive devices is having a devastating humanitarian impact on civilians and civilian infrastructure. We support the Secretary-General's view, expressed in his latest report, on the development of policy standards to limit the use of explosive devices in populated areas, as a means to significantly strengthen the protection of civilians.

We acknowledge the crucial role of peacekeeping missions in protecting civilians and as an important component of the global commitment to preventing and settling conflicts peacefully. The High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations rightly identified the protection of civilians in armed conflicts as a core principle of international humanitarian law and a moral responsibility of the United Nations. Furthermore, the Panel reiterated the need for strengthened partnerships and cooperation with regional organizations, in particular with the African Union, taking into account that most peacekeeping operations are deployed in Africa. The Council will have an opportunity to engage with the African Union within a few days when we travel to Africa, and especially to Burundi, in regard to the protection of civilians.

In conclusion, Angola fully endorses the high-level recommendations on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and its call for sustained, predictable and flexible funding mechanisms in support of African Union peace operations. Finally, we recall the United Nations fundamental purpose to apply preventive diplomacy to reduce the risk of armed conflicts and the core principle of international efforts to prevent, settle peacefully and protect civilians under threat.

This open debate today, judging from the wide support and response of the membership, is a clear sign that we are not yet doing what is required of the Security Council and that there is a wide gap between policy and practice. Let us use this debate and opportunity to rededicate ourselves to the Council and to take advantage of the great opportunity it affords the Council.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I wish to welcome His Excellency Mr. José Luis Cancela, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay. (*spoke in English*)

My gratitude also goes to the Deputy Secretary-General, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the representative of OXFAM for their briefings. I add my voice to others to praise the humanitarian workers of the United Nations, the ICRC, OXFAM and other humanitarian non-governmental organizations for their tireless efforts, often made at the risk of their lives, to help those who are suffering in armed conflicts.

Today's topic, the protection of civilians in armed conflict, is one of the most pertinent subjects that the Security Council has to deal with. The appalling situation in Syria, which the Council has been discussing intensively for years, illustrates vividly the importance of this issue. Japan associates itself with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Since the Swiss statement will cover many aspects mentioned in the President's concept note (S/2016/22, annex), I would like to focus my statement on two points only: compliance and accountability.

As the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/453), submitted in June 2015, points out, ensuring compliance in armed conflicts remains a challenge to the international community. The thirty-second International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which took place just one month ago in Geneva, was a real opportunity for the international community to demonstrate its commitment to strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law. One of the important outcomes that many of us expected to see was the adoption of comprehensive mechanisms and the strengthening of the normative framework of international humanitarian law. Very regrettably, however, we failed to reach an agreement. Mechanisms that strongly encouraged relevant parties to comply with international humanitarian law are more than ever awaited. Member States should strive ceaselessly and in a more inclusive manner to establish such mechanisms. On that issue, Japan will continue to engage in discussions with other Member States.

When compliance fails, accountability must play its role. Effective accountability deters non-compliance. I believe that we have a unique tool to enhance accountability when national judicial systems are

not sufficient; we all know that is the International Criminal Court (ICC). Recently, we have witnessed a case in which the ICC completed its first judicial cycle of crimes committed against civilians, which includes the issuance of arrest warrants, the surrender of the defendant, a trial, a judgement and, finally, a sentence served. In this case, it took more than eight years to complete this cycle.

I am fully aware that States Members of the United Nations have varying views and perspectives on the ICC, but it is the first permanent international criminal court. It is not an ad hoc court. It is the first permanent international criminal court that can hold accountable perpetrators of crimes committed against civilians. With 123 States parties, which is very close to two-thirds of the entire membership of the United Nations, the ICC can be the most effective tool available to ensure accountability. Therefore, I would like to strongly encourage Member States that have not done so to become States parties to the ICC. Let us make the Court more universal so that we can effectively deter crimes committed against civilians. I believe that the Security Council, on its part, can do more to enhance cooperation and communication with the ICC. To those ends, Japan is willing to work together with the Member States in and outside the Council.

In conclusion, I would like to refer to the importance of promoting human security while protecting civilians. In my view, it is not sufficient to simply protect civilians from physical harm. Their human dignity must also be protected. Vulnerable people in armed conflicts cannot recover their dignity if they are left in extreme poverty and fear. They need to be empowered to become constructive actors in their communities by such means as improving health-care systems and education. Japan, being a strong advocate of human security, will further strengthen humanitarian and development assistance to address such needs.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

Finally, it is nearly 1 p.m.; we began this debate three hours ago. There still remains one Council member to speak and a lot of people are waiting. We have 77 speakers today. I think that we, the Security Council, need to put a little order into all of this and to set a time limit so that all Member States, not just members of the Council but all Members of the United Nations that desire to take the floor to speak will be able to do so before 5.30 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the representative of Japan for his kind words, and we will definitely take the necessary measures to integrate efficiency into the work of the Council.

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We, too, are grateful to the Uruguayan presidency for its initiative to return to the issue of the protection of civilians in times of armed conflict. We thank the Deputy Secretary-General and the other speakers for their assessments and useful information.

The issue of protection of civilians is on the Security Council's agenda as one of the key elements for the resolution of armed conflicts and the maintenance international peace and security as a whole. Unfortunately, cruelty and disdain for human life are characteristic of a number of contemporary armed conflicts. Civilians are killed and maimed by the indiscriminate use of force or deliberate attacks, and subjected to torture and other cruel and inhuman treatment and punishment and to various forms of violence. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and other groups allied to that criminal terrorist structure, which are running rampant in Iraq, Syria and other countries, are committing horrific atrocities against civilians, including women and children.

The protection of civilians remains the priority responsibility of the parties to a conflict. An important role in the success of national efforts in that sphere can be played by assistance to Governments from the international community. Military response is possible only with the authorization of the Security Council and in strict compliance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. We agree with the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations,and the Secretary-General on the need for political dialogue as a priority instrument in settling conflict situations, including in the context of the protection of civilians. We consider that task to be one of the elements of the activities of United Nations peacekeeping missions mandated under Chapter VII of the Charter.

Key benchmarks in that sphere should be the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the basic principles of the United Nations peacemaking. We cannot agree with the periodic calls for their flexible interpretation, depending on changing circumstances on the ground, above all in the context of the use of force by Blue Helmets. Undoubtedly, what is unacceptable is

any crime against civilians by peacekeepers themselves, such as the egregious cases of sexual violence that have surfaced in recent months.

We attach great importance to the establishment of conditions conducive to the proper and timely provision of humanitarian assistance to populations in need. We note the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations in that sphere. The Council has repeatedly called on parties to armed conflict to unswervingly abide by the provisions of international humanitarian law with regard to respect for and protection of humanitarian and medical personnel working in armed conflict zones. Nevertheless, the situation in that sphere leaves much to be desired, and the lives and well-being of those who provide assistance to victims continue to be exposed to unwarranted threats. In October 2015, dozens of people were killed in an air strike on a hospital run by the international non-governmental organization (NGO) Médecins Sans Frontières in Kunduz. Very recently, an air strike was also carried out on a medical centre run by the same NGO in Yemen.

Contemporary armed conflicts are accompanied by the massive displacement of civilians. The unprecedented increase in the number of people who have been forced to leave their homes — the largest number since since the Second World War— and the continuous rise in humanitarian needs is a serious test of the United Nations mettle.

It will be possible to overcome the modern migratory and humanitarian crises caused largely by conflicts provoked from outside in the Middle East and North Africa only through political settlement and the socioeconomic stabilization of situations in migrant countries of origin. Special attention needs to be given to issues of providing and protecting their rights in host countries, taking into account the specifics and traditions of various cultures and religions, and ensuring that forced migrants are not automatically equated with potential terrorists.

The guarantee for success in sparing civilians the brunt of the suffering caused by conflicts in their midst lies in unflinching compliance with the Charter of the United Nations, the norms of international humanitarian law and relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as in eschewing politicized, selective and unilateral approaches to that issue. Only in that way will the decisions taken be truly effective and ensure genuine protection for civilians during armed conflict.

One cannot help noting that the importance and relevance of the theme of protecting civilians, and its often highly emotional resonance, makes its susceptible to unscrupulous exploitation for dubious political ends. Unfortunately, that has happened today. Clearly, the thinking is that using this discussion as a vehicle to trot out another slew of unsubstantiated accusations against Russia will give it some kind of legitimacy.

Civilians, including women and children, make up a significant part of those who have died and been injured as a result of the conflict in Ukraine. That is the tragic result of the refusal in 2014 by the Kyiv authorities to engage in dialogue with the East and their attempt to resolve the problem by carrying out a mass military operation that they cynically dubbed "counter-terrorist". The solemn vow made by President of Ukraine on 1 July 2014 never to use force against civilians and not to target residential areas was followed by mass shelling of settlements in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, and the number of civilians continues to grow with each passing day. Kyiv's continued economic blockade of the region continues to take its toll on the region.

The most reliable way to end the suffering of residents in the Donbas is the timely settlement of the crisis on the basis of the clear implementation of all provisions of the Minsk agreements. The parties to the conflict, above all the Ukrainian authorities, must find the political will to implement the decisions enshrined in the Minsk package of measures.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I to appeal to speakers to deliver their statements at a normal speed so that interpretation may be provided accurately.

I now give the floor to the representative of Rwanda.

Mr. Gasana (Rwanda): I would like to join others in thanking you, Sir, and your delegation for organizing this important debate. I would also like to express my appreciation to Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson for his briefing, which reaffirms his unwavering

commitment to the protection of civilians agenda, especially in promoting a culture of prevention. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Ms. Eveline Rooijmans, Oxfam Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor, for being here with us today and for their work, despite the challenges and the risks involved.

Our history has informed our resolve to advocate for and contribute, where possible, to the protection of civilians entangled in today's armed conflicts. One life lost is one too many. We can all agree on that point. We believe that you, Sir, also hold this conviction, Uruguay being one of the first signatories of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians.

May I start by sharing how I view the protection of civilians mandate is understood among the international community. Some troop- and police-contributing countries believe they are deployed to protect by their presence — an idea that suggests a more static approach to protection of civilians. Other troop- and police-contributors adhere to a more proactive approach to the protection of civilians, by implementing a robust approach in the implementation of their mandate. However, those differing views on the protection-of-civilians mandate are not new. Since the establishment of the United Nations, some 70 years ago, the Security Council has adopted a number of resolutions and strategies to protect civilians in armed conflict, including landmark resolution 1265 (1999). However, in 1994 more than 1 million were killed during the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. That was one of the darkest moments in the modern history of humankind and of peacekeeping.

Today, more than 20 years since the genocide against the Tutsi, we keep asking ourselves — why? Why did the United Nations do little to nothing to protect Rwandans? Why did the international community not step in and prevent the fastest-moving genocide of the twentieth century? To this day, we still have no clear answer. In my own region, the Great Lakes region, we have a peacekeeping mission that is supposed to provide protection to civilians entangled in armed conflict, but we have seen time and again that it has struggled to deliver on that crucial promise to protect. Despite the presence of the largest peacekeeping force — the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Force Intervention Brigade — which are equipped with all types of equipment and enablers, we are still facing roaming predators against civilians, mainly the so-called Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, the former genocidal forces in Rwanda.

While we understand that the responsibility to protect civilians lies primarily with the host country, our main source of frustration today is the continued inability of the international community, in a timely manner, to rapidly respond to conflicts that may turn violent, which could serve to effectively protect civilians.

I would like to now take the time to touch upon some challenges that we believe significantly impact the implementation of the protection-of-civilians mandates in today's peacekeeping missions.

First, we are still divided over what the use of force entails. That is worrisome, considering the thousands of peacekeepers entrusted with saving the lives of civilians throughout the world. We need to clearly and thoroughly confirm what is entailed, particularly when the threat to civilians may arise from groups that claim to be affiliated with the host Government. We seek a common mindset.

Secondly, we must achieve sound and effective rapid deployment. Even if we are to obtain the necessary number of troops, the required contingent-owned equipment and more, none of it matters if we cannot rapidly deploy. As the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations noted,

> "Truly rapid and effective deployment capacities will always come at a cost, but a more reliable system for responding quickly to save lives and arrest emerging conflicts can potentially avoid a larger, more costly response later." (*S/2015/446, para. 197*).

Thirdly, we must avoid template approaches that constrain protection-of-civilians mandates and the respective peacekeeping mission. Now is the time for us, the international community, to act boldly, strategically and flexibly. Applying tailored approaches means assessing the situation on the ground and the capabilities needed to properly protect civilians, and, as highlighted by the High-level Panel, to "build upon existing sources of resilience and local protection" (*ibid, para. 94*). Template mandates and missions must be left in the past.

Fourthly, while a lot has been done by troop- and police-contributing countries and the United Nations to improve the protection of civilians, the increasing violence against civilians has tested the fundamental principles and capabilities of our operations and demonstrated that much remains to be done. Our experience on the ground has proved that peacekeeping operations that are ill-prepared, with no adequate means to address large-scale violence directed against civilians, will falter and may even collapse.

Fifthly, we must understand the root causes of the conflicts we face so that we can thoroughly protect civilians. Such an understanding will, in turn, allow us to understand the "hows" and "whys" of attacks on civilians, which, as the High-level Panel noted, that allows for identifying proper responses to threats against civilians.

Lastly, there often exists a gap between the expectations surrounding civilian protection and the actual capabilities possessed by peacekeepers. Both must be considered in the design of mandates. We believe that threats to civilians and solutions to them should inform mission mandates, strategies, structures and resources allocation, as set out in the benchmarks outlined in the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians. As the Council will recall, the Principles were the outcome of the high-level international conference that we hosted in May 2015. As the concept note (S/2016/22, annex) rightly puts it, the benchmarks set out in the Kigali Principles offer proactive, practical ways that could lead to addressing current challenges in implementing protection-of-civilians mandates.

We thank the Member States that endorsed the Principles at an early stage, including your country, Sir, Uruguay. We encourage others to join us in that endeavour. In collaboration with the United Nations, regional and subregional organizations and other Member States, we hope to streamline the Principles into the core of the protection-of-civilians agenda. That will help us overcome the challenges we face in the protection of civilians and the implementation of that mandate.

In the coming months — in April, I think — we will co-host an international conference with the United States Africa Command and the Netherlands, which will serve as a follow-up to the protection-of-civilians conference held in Kigali last year. We look forward to Council members' participation.

Allow me to also emphasize the role of regional and subregional organizations, which we believe could enhance the implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates due to their cultural and regional proximity and local knowledge of conflict dynamics, as well as their ability to deploy quickly. It is my hope that this organ will continue to maximize the use of their comparative advantages, involving them throughout the process of missions deployment, including consultations on mandate design.

In conclusion, I wish to share the following words of President Paul Kagame:

> "We cannot turn the clock back, nor can we undo the harm caused, but we have the power to determine the future and to ensure that what happened never happens again."

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): I warmly congratulate you, Mr. President, and the Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and for having convened this meeting and having drafted an excellent concept note (S/2016/22, annex).

(*spoke in English*)

I also thank the Deputy Secretary-General, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the representative of Oxfam for their enlightening briefings. Let me express my appreciation for the courageous work carried out by the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement, even under extremely dangerous circumstances.

We associate ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

We stand at the crossroads of three ambitious reviews on international peace and security, all of which are highly relevant to our debates on the protection of civilians during armed conflict. There are clear convergences among the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446), the report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture (see S/2015/490) and the global study on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace nad security. Those three documents, which have been well received by the membership at large, emphasize

the primacy of politics and encourage the adoption of a more integrated approach towards "sustaining peace". All three reviews endorsed the fundamental notion that preventing and resolving conflict through peaceful means is the most effective way to shield civilians from the miseries of war.

Conversely, the ill-advised notion that the protection of civilians is better guaranteed through the use of force finds no evidence in reality, and more often than not exacerbates the suffering of innocents and leads to negative humanitarian consequences. The stark lessons of Libya must not be ignored: once unleashed, the spiral of war and destruction cannot easily be contained. The basic ethical precept of medicine since Hippocrates — "do no harm" — should be applied to multilateral discussions as a basic tenet for the protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict.

Moreover, Brazil has consistently advocated that the use of force, if and when authorized by the Security Council as a last resort means of protection, should be employed responsibly. That means that action should be judicious, proportionate and strictly limited to the objectives of the mandate. In order to achieve that, we believe that two practical steps, both of them based on existing mechanisms in the Security Council, could be taken. First, we should borrow from the procedures related to the peacekeeping system practice of reporting to and briefing delegations. Secondly, we should create monitoring mechanisms by establishing panels of experts modelled after the United Nations sanctions committees. The international community has a right to expect full accountability from those to whom authority is given to resort to force.

The latest report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2015/453) depicts a bleak scenario. Non-State actors, including terrorist groups with no regard for international humanitarian law and international human rights law, deliberately target civilians, and vulnerable populations in particular, as a military tactic. Such violations deserve the strongest condemnation.

At the same time, it is of the utmost importance that national Governments make all the necessary efforts to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law, including, among others, preventing indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population and protected sites, such as schools and hospitals. As the concept note circulated by the delegation of Uruguay points out, one of the main objectives of today's debate must be to enhance humanitarian compliance and legal accountability. This meeting should also reaffirm the universal and binding character of the Geneva Conventions, as well as other obligations set forth by relevant customary law.

In order to ensure that civilians in situations of conflict will be safe, we should continuously strive to enhance our legal, political and diplomatic framework aimed at strengthening compliance with, and ensuring the implementation of, international humanitarian law. During the thirty-second International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, held last month in Geneva, Brazil supported the creation of a voluntary and non-politicized meeting of States to share international humanitarian law expertise and discuss humanitarian trends and challenges. We must ensure that the intergovernmental process launched by the Conference will contribute to a future agreement in that regard.

The forthcoming World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, to be held in May, will be another auspicious occasion to reaffirm our commitment to international humanitarian law, including the imperative to protect civilians from the consequences of armed conflict, and to improve international coordination. Likewise, the high-level plenary meeting on refugees and migrants, to he held prior to the general debate of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session next September will discuss concrete measures to safeguard these particularly vulnerable populations.

The dialogue on humanitarian Partnership, co-chaired by Brazil and Sweden, has established a productive informal venue for the examination of how to improve global responses to key humanitarian issues and challenges among Member States, the United Nations and specialized agencies.

Lastly, the Security Council, in exercising its prerogatives under the Charter of the United Nations on the maintenance of international peace and security, should continue to address emerging humanitarian and protection issues as a matter of priority. We welcome the Council's request to the Secretary-General to increase the frequency of the reports on the protection of civilians, now to be submitted every 12 months, and encourage the Council to hold regular meetings on the issue.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Bamrungphong (Thailand): At the outset, Thailand congratulates Uruguay for assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. My delegation would also like to express its appreciation to the delegation of Uruguay for the comprehensive concept note (S/2016/22, annex), to the Deputy Secretary-General, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as to the Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor of Oxfam, for their substantive briefings.

Thailand aligns itself with the statement of the Human Security Network, to be delivered by the Permanent Representative of Slovenia.

Thailand shares the international community's serious concern about the rising number of civilian casualties in armed conflict. There are no legitimate reasons that can justify deliberate attacks against innocent civilians, including humanitarian actors, for either military or political purposes. Please allow me to highlight pertinent points that Thailand deems very important.

First, the protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of host Governments. In cases where Governments have the political will but lack the capacity, the international community can provide capacity-building support in addressing root causes of conflict and in the area of preventive measures, namely, the rule of law, good governance, social justice, security reform, social and economic development and equality, for instance.

Secondly, peacekeeping operations with protection mandates are very crucial when the host Government fails to live up to its responsibility to protect. A mission's mandate needs to be clearly endorsed by the Security Council. It is also important for peacekeepers to have a clear mandate, responsibilities and chain of command. The protection of civilians guidance and the code of conduct under specific circumstances, particularly when the use of force is necessary, need to be put in place to ensure a mission's credibility and success. Comprehensive predeployment training and periodic in-mission training are necessary, as recommended by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations. Peacekeepers must also be well equipped with knowledge of international law.

Thirdly, the allocation of resources for peacekeeping missions needs to be adequate and predictable to enable missions to fulfil their mandates efficiently.

Fourthly, the changing nature of conflicts necessitates the protection of civilians. The Security Council needs to assess the situation on the ground and review the scope of the mandates of peacekeeping missions on a regular basis based on the situation and risk assessment provided by the Secretariat. That will enable the Council to employ the right tool at the right time. It is also crucial that the Council work closely with troop-contributing countries to enhance coherence and coordinated responses.

Fifthly, Thailand strongly supports the inclusion of the protection-of-civilians advisers, as well as protection officers for children and women, in peacekeeping operations with protection mandates. The early detection of human rights violations and other tactics of war will save more innocent lives.

Sixthly, the increased number of civilian casualties is a clear indication of non-compliance with international law and universal principles. The strong and repeated calls of the international community on parties to conflicts, including non-State armed groups, to uphold international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as well as to implement all the relevant Council resolutions have been ignored. Thailand therefore supports the work of fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry, which will help to end impunity and to hold accountable those who have committed serious crimes against civilians.

Lastly, we see the urgent need to strengthen coordination among relevant United Nations bodies to protect civilians, as well as to address the root causes of conflict. Thailand also underscores the indispensable role of regional and subregional organizations, local communities and civil society in that respect. Their insights and understanding of specific situations on the ground can contribute to the Council's swift response to imminent threats to civilians.

In conclusion, Thailand will continue our constructive role and close cooperation with the international community in the important endeavour to protect civilians and alleviate their sufferings.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Hungary.

Ms. Bogyay (Hungary): Always thinking the unthinkable, expecting the unexpected, being totally vulnerable and living the solitude of the global world — this is what it means to be a non-military, ordinary, private citizen in armed conflict.

I wish to thank Uruguay for having convened today's open debate. Hungary aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

We believe that thousands of civilians are not only suffering from the impact of armed conflicts but are becoming subjected to the military strategies of various parties to conflict. The international community must step up all its efforts to enhance respect for international humanitarian law. Hungary hopes that the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent will reach an agreement on the mechanism to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law, although discussions will continue on the issue. We must also take into account that the lines that separate international and internal armed conflicts have become increasingly blurred, which may lead to uncertainty regarding applicable rules and their interpretations. For that reason, we think that it is of utmost importance that we continue the dialogue on current international humanitarian law issues.

Hungary attaches especially great importance to the protection of women and children. We support international initiatives aimed at combating sexual violence in conflict, particularly against the most vulnerable, and we have contributed to United Nations projects for the elimination of all forms of such crimes. The Hungarian Government has also provided assistance to international projects aimed at protecting children affected by armed conflict and humanitarian crises, including children in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, the Sudan and the Central African Republic.

The protection of civilians should be integral to the whole United Nations peace operation having such a mandate. It is important to maintain continuous consultations and enhanced communication among the Security Council, the Secretariat and contributing countries about possible gaps in mission mandates. As we have always stressed, we agree that accountability and ending impunity are key to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Hungary wishes to actively contribute to the initiative on a multilateral treaty for mutual legal assistance and extradition in the domestic prosecution of atrocity crimes — an initiative that is supported by the International Criminal Court and a number of States and aimed at enhancing and making horizontal cooperation among States more effective in the process of prosecuting war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Hungary believes that the best way to protect civilians is by preventing armed conflicts. The United Nations should use all available tools for early warning and for political mediation in order to prevent the outbreak and reverse the escalation of hostilities. We would also like to reaffirm the relevance of the responsibility to protect in today's discussion. To ensure a more timely and decisive response on the part of the Security Council, we actively participated in the drafting of the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes.

As my closing remark, I wish to strongly encourage those Member States that have not yet done so to join the initiative, which represents not only a unique chance to improve the Security Council's ability to prevent and respond to atrocities, but also an opportunity to preserve the Council's legacy and legitimacy as a guardian of international peace and security.

As this is the first time that we are speaking this year in the Security Council, I wish to congratulate the presidency and all Council members.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): Mr. President, I thank you for continuing the tradition of offering an opportunity early in the year to articulate views on the important subject of the protection of civilians.

The Security Council has, in the post-millennial world, stretched the canvas of mandates and broadened the ambit of action to include the requirement to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence in most United Nations peacekeeping operations established since 1999. We therefore see today's debate as an ongoing lessons-learned exercise. Permit me to encapsulate our views on this important subject.

First, India condemns the oppressive use of violence against civilian populations, regardless of who commits it. That malaise is not new. Wars in pursuit of imperial ambitions testify to a history of scant respect for civilian lives in times of military campaigns.

However, the nature of threats faced by civilians in United Nations peacekeeping situations has undergone significant changes in recent years.

Secondly, we believe that the protection of civilians is primarily a national responsibility. Contributions to national capacity-building, rather than intervention mechanisms, should therefore be the priority. Local societies have developed coping strategies for protection before the deployment of a United Nations mission and will apply them after the withdrawal of a mission. Approaches that are drawn up during peacekeeping should therefore be built on an appreciation for the social capital of host communities to manage their own protection.

Thirdly, solutions to threats of violence to civilian populations should be sought within the framework of international law. The response of the international community must be based on the use of appropriate methods in proportion to the perceived threat.

It is our experience that peacekeepers often rise to the occasion when required. Let me recall the example of Captain Salaria who led an Indian infantry brigade in November 1961, as part of the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC) in operations against the Katangese Gendarmerie Forces, for the establishment of a neutral zone in North Katanga to restore peace for the civilian population of Elizabethville. Captain Salaria and the majority of 45 Indian peacekeepers who died in ONUC paid with their lives, even though the notion of the protection of civilians was not part of that mandate. Yet, in 1962 India recognized that effort of a Blue Helmet to protect civilians by posthumously awarding its highest award for gallantry, the Param Vir Chakra. Alas, it took the United Nations more than 35 years to decide on and confer the Dag Hammarskjöld Medal for the same deed of protecting civilians.

As a developing country with years of peacekeeping experience, we feel that frequent and regular consultation among the Council, the Secretariat and troop-contributing countries will enhance the credibility and effectiveness of the Council in protecting civilians. The absence of consultation hurts everyone: the country hosting the peacekeeping mission; the troop-contributing countries that put their troops' lives at risk in the service of the United Nations; the Council as an institution; and the United Nations. It is ultimately the United Nations as a body that gets a bad name when the Council's decisions go wrong.

Finally, by definition, peacekeeping is a temporary and transitional measure. The time has therefore perhaps come to consider disaggregating the complex, multidimensional nature of United Nations peacekeeping mandates and address issues confronting the protection of civilians in armed conflict situations through focused peacebuilding activities, so that the transition to a post-conflict society can be sustainable. Efforts at peacebuilding should be initiated at the beginning, and the cause of the armed conflict addressed through national reconciliation and inclusive political processes, giving all sections of society a stake in peaceful coexistence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sweden.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and my own country Sweden. My full statement will be made available through other means, and I will limit myself to some — in our view — key elements for the sake of brevity.

First of all, I would like to express my recognition, respect and admiration for Oxfam, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian actors for the work they do every day, and I urge everyone to give them our full support.

The besieged town of Madaya in Syria provides the most recent image of the horrifying and totally unacceptable suffering inflicted on civilians in armed conflict. Reports of staggering numbers of civilian victims at the hands of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham is another. The protection of vulnerable populations is a core task of the United Nations, and we must ensure that the United Nations lives up to that task, as laid out in the Charter. Therefore, the debate today is both timely and necessary.

Currently, 10 out of 16 United Nations peacekeeping operations have the protection of civilians at the core of their mandates. While host States bear the primary responsibility to protect their population — as has been stated numerous times today — United Nations peace operations must be able to assist States in fulfilling that responsibility. Peacekeeping operations, as well as many other parts of the United Nations system, also play a preventive role, and they need to report to the Security Council if civilians are at risk. Timely briefings by the Special Advisers to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect

in contributing to early awareness of potential crises, in line with the Human Rights Up Front initiative, are instruments that need to be fully utilized. I would like to highlight three particularly important aspects related to the protection of civilians.

First, a zero-tolerance policy must be applied against gender-based violence, including sexual abuse and exploitation. The United Nations should never be seen as failing to act in holding those responsible to account, regardless of the perpetrators. The special protections needs of women and girls must be addressed.

Secondly, the flow of arms to conflict areas further increases the risks for civilians. The Arms Trade Treaty, with its humanitarian goals, provides a tool for addressing those problems, and we urge all countries to join the Treaty. We also support the call of the Secretary-General on parties in conflict to avoid using explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas. Attacks on education centres and the military use of schools and universities are on the increase. Special efforts are needed to ensure the safe education for children and young people in countries affected by conflict.

Thirdly, international humanitarian law has been established to protect civilians in conflict. We all have a responsibility to ensure that that is upheld, that violations are prevented and that accountability is ensured when the law is violated. The importance of the provision by all actors of rapid, unimpeded and sustained passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in conflict zones is not only a moral obligation; it is a legal obligation.

The role of United Nations peace missions in protecting civilians when Member States and armed groups do not cannot be overstated. As troop contributors, we have a responsibility to stay and deliver. However, we know that this task is not only challenging, but also dangerous. National caveats should be avoided to ensure that missions can operate effectively. We need to improve cooperation with local and national authorities and provide proper training and equipment to United Nations troops. The training of local authorities is often key.

The Nordic States have actively worked on those issues and gained first-hand experience, most recently in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The efficient protection of civilians requires close cooperation with other troop-contributing countries, as well as coordination with local authorities. In MINUSMA, the creation of a protection of civilians task force with civilian, military and police personnel has been set up, and furthermore MINUSMA has been providing the Malian security forces with training, enhancing their own capacity to protect civilians.

But ultimately, strengthening the capability of United Nations peace operations requires realistic mandates, proper preparation, strong capacity and adequate resources. We echo the Secretary-General's call on the Security Council to provide active, political and operational support to that end, and we support his focus on the political settlement of conflicts in his report on the implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446).

If 2015 was a year of reflection and providing recommendations, 2016 should be the year of implementation and concrete action.

Mr. Alday González (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico thanks Uruguay for having convened this meeting and Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson and the representatives of civil society for their briefings.

The protection of civilians is at the very heart of all that the Council and the Organization are striving to achieve, and is the measure against which the United Nations system and its peacekeeping operations are judged. It is a basic principle of international humanitarian law and a moral responsibility of all Member States. However, history has shown us that moral exhortations and laws are often challenged or ignored, and are therefore insufficient to prevent or eliminate armed conflict or ensure the protection of civilians in such conflicts. The effectiveness of the Security Council and the United Nations in protecting civilians has had mixed results; some timely actions have managed to save lives, but in other cases systemic constraints arising from the lack of consensus in the Council or valid concerns about sovereignty have prevented early action that would have been more effective.

As we have seen in the prolonged and complex conflicts in the Middle East and Central and Western Africa, civilians are increasingly exposed, either because schools and hospitals have become military targets, or because hundreds of thousands are denied timely access to humanitarian assistance. Both

cases constitute flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, and we therefore believe that our responsibility to protect must be supported by our responsibility to improve our response capacity.

United Nations peacekeeping mandates have been strengthened with training, policies and guidance on the best way to implement the protection of civilians and human rights. However, the inclusion of civilian advisers on the protection of children or women has not yet managed to change the reality on the ground.

As the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations has proposed, it is essential whenever possible to involve and ensure that Governments complement the development of concepts, standards and deployment of specialized United Nations personnel, assuming their competency as the principals responsible for protecting civilians. The presence of a United Nations mission does not reduce the host Government's responsibility, nor should the State's responsibility weaken the duty of peacekeeping missions. We therefore welcome the updated aide memoire annexed to the presidential statement on the protection of civilians of November 2015 (S/PRST/2015/23), and emphasize its importance as a practical tool to improve the Council's analysis and diagnostics on the topic of protection.

Threats to international peace and security continue to arise largely from the proliferation and possession of weapons of mass destruction and from the notion that the most powerful countries can choose to position themselves above international law. In all the Council's efforts to fulfil its primary responsibility, disarmament and non-proliferation remain a dominant need. The ease with which conventional weapons can be acquired, especially through illicit trafficking, multiplies the impact of conflicts on and risks to civilian populations. Mexico reiterates its call for the implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty in order to ensure, inter alia, that arms transfers by Member States are subject to the compliance of the recipient State with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

As the High-level Independent Panel and the Secretary-General indicate in their respective reports (S/2015/446 and S/2015/453), prevention must be at the heart of all efforts to maintain international peace and security. If the Security Council is able to anticipate and better respond to potential threats, we are convinced that it could also be more effective in preventing crises from becoming uncontrollable armed conflicts with their inherent ramifications for the civilian population. In that context, we hope that the Council members' visit to Burundi in the coming days will be an important step in that direction.

We support the recommendations of both the Independent Panel and of the Secretary-General to improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations in the field of protection in areas such as planning, evaluation, capacity-building and leadership, as well to give them with realistic mandates tailored to specific contexts and linked to broader political solutions. We urge the Council in particular to consider the Independent Panel's recommendation that peacekeeping missions collaborate more closely with local communities and non-governmental organizations on the ground in order to establish an effective environment for protection and provide rapid responses to potential threats.

Delays and inaction in the protection of civilians can often mean the difference between life and death. In Mexico's opinion, the multilateral system of collective security, especially the Security Council, remain the best option to implement the lessons learned in the service of our ongoing aspiration to achieve sustainable peace. The fusion of prevention and political influence with rapid response on the ground can help us to ensure that the Organization will no longer leave a place where it is most needed or abandon the most vulnerable when their protection is most urgent.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Roet (Israel): Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate Uruguay on joining the Security Council and on acceding to the presidency this month. We are quite aware of how difficult it is to be a President of the Security Council, but even more so in one's first month of membership. We wish you good luck, Sir, and give you our thanks.

Let me start by quoting the Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda, Major General Roméo Dallaire, in his haunting account of the Rwandan genocide:

> "[T]he worst eyes that haunt me are the eyes of those people who were totally bewildered. They're looking at me with my blue beret and they're saying, 'What in the hell happened? We were moving towards peace. You were there as the guarantor. How come I'm dying here?' Those eyes dominated

and they're absolutely right. How come my mission failed?"

Twenty-one years have passed since the Rwandan genocide, but the mission of protecting civilians remains a pressing challenge and a primary responsibility of the international community. Over the past decade, the number of people in need of international humanitarian assistance has tripled. The overwhelming majority of those people are civilians affected by armed conflict and other stressful emergencies. Today, men and women in numerous places around the world are at risk. Civilians have become pawns in a game in which State and non-State actors use them to gain political leverage. Attacks directed at civilians have become depressingly routine, and we receive daily reports of new atrocities that shake the human conscience.

Nowhere in the world is the situation more heartbreaking than in Syria. Al-Assad's murderous regime has been attacking and killing civilians by the hundreds of thousands. Despite the fact that the Security Council has adopted numerous resolutions demanding that the Syrian Government allow free access for United Nations humanitarian aid, attempts to deliver cross-border and cross-line humanitarian aid are being impeded because of the challenging security and operational environment. In the meantime, people continue to suffer.

We have all witnessed the struggle of the people of the Syrian town of Madaya, where 42,000 people have been taken hostage by Al-Assad and his Hizbullah allies. The town and its people are under siege and surrounded by barbed wire, land mines and snipers. Left without basic access to food, men, women and children have been dying on a daily basis due to starvation and the harsh winter weather. They find themselves resorting to eating household pets and making soup from grass. A Cable News Network report on Syria described the situation on the ground: "The starvation here is no act of God — not the result of drought or flooding or crop failure. This famine is man-made."

Let me state the obvious. The use of starvation as a weapon of war is deplorable, and it is a war crime. The dire situation in Madaya is an example that has captured public attention, but it is estimated that this is merely a tenth of the number of those stranded in besieged or hard-to-reach areas as conditions grow steadily worse. Hizbullah, the enforcer of Iranian and Syrian orders, the recruiter of children to fight in Syria, is the prime organization terrorizing the people of Madaya. That should not come as a surprise. Terrorizing civilian populations is part of Hizbullah's modus operandi. This is what they do. Israel has warned time and time again that letting Hizbullah's actions go unchecked will only result in more death, pain and suffering. Over the course of years, Hizbullah has been indiscriminately firing rockets towards heavily populated areas in Israel, while using the people of southern Lebanon as human shields.

One example is the southern Lebanese village of Muhaybib, where Hizbullah has moved military infrastructure into that and other villages in the surrounding area. Those villages, where innocent civilians go about their daily lives, have been transformed into military bases. Who speaks for these people? Who protects these people from Hizbullah? According to recent reports, the village, consisting of 90 houses in total, contains no less than nine arms depots, five rocket launch sites, four infantry positions, three underground tunnels, three anti-tank positions and a command post. Let me again state the obvious. Deliberately putting the lives of innocent civilians in harm's way is a war crime.

As Uruguay is a new member of the Security Council, I would like to inform you, Mr. President, that unfortunately the threat to the lives of Lebanese and Israeli civilians alike is rarely mentioned in the Chamber. It is the responsibility of the Security Council to identify rising threats and to prevent such situations from escalating. The Security Council should send a clear message to Hizbullah, as well as to Lebanon, that this cannot be tolerated. The tactic of taking civilian populations hostage for political and military advantage has steadily become a primary method of waging war by States and non-State actors. Protecting civilians under such circumstances, while holding non-State actors to their obligations under international humanitarian law, is our biggest collective challenge.

Reviewing the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446), we are encouraged that it recognizes that, in cases of imminent threat, the United Nations must rise to the challenge of protecting civilians. Furthermore, recognizing the linkage between a wider political approach and the United Nations responsibility towards civilians will enable the setting of realistic mandates with a possibility of implementation and plan of action.

Before concluding, I would like to pay tribute to the brave men and women peacekeepers who have lost their lives while serving in the most dangerous places on the globe. To those who continue to serve, let me reiterate Israel's appreciation for their work. They have had a life-changing impact on millions of people that are in dire need of protection.

Next week the General Assembly will mark the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. We know all too well the horrors that humankind is capable of. Promises have been made, yet the international community has failed at too many junctures. We must fulfil what we promised 70 years ago — never again. We must not allow dictators and terrorist organizations to dictate the rules of the game. Too many lives are at stake. That is the message the Council should send today.

Mr. Kabentayev (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Spanish*): I commend the presidency of Uruguay for convening this debate on the protection of civilians, who are extremely vulnerable to attacks during the current increasingly intense conflicts accompanied by an unprecedented magnitude of human rights violations. Kazakhstan therefore calls for complete and strict implementation of the report of the Secretary-General of June 2015 on the relevant recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/453).

The High-level Independent Panel proposed that mandates to protect civilians should be coherent with a comprehensive political strategy. Peacekeeping missions mandated to use force must protect civilians. We fully support the Secretary-General's proposals for the active use of non-military protection tools, including strong political advocacy, vigilant reporting and monitoring, together with the introduction of comprehensive security-sector reforms, the rule of law and good governance, and an end to all impunity.

Kazakhstan attaches the utmost importance to the security of civilians, as evidenced in its engagement in United Nations peacekeeping operations in Western Sahara and Côte d'Ivoire.

The Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, initiated by Kazakhstan, has become a good platform for cooperation and dialogue in Asia, and it has great potential for contributing to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

As proposed by the President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev, the final document of the fifth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which was held in June 2015 in Astana, calls on all parties around the world involved in conflicts to cease violence, declare truce and, through negotiations, reach an agreement to end hostilities, protect civilians and find a peaceful resolution to all tensions.

We are convinced that the long-term work of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoys should be strongly supported by the Council and Member States. We support the activities of the United Nations regional offices, which serve as platforms for preventive diplomacy. Kazakhstan has proposed the establishment of a United Nations regional hub for sustainable development and humanitarian assistance in Almaty, which would complement the work of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia in the vast territory of the Eurasian region.

Kazakhstan, as a current Chair of the Gender Equality Working Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and one of the sponsors, along with Austria, Finland and Turkey, of the OSCE-wide action plan on women, peace and security, calls for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), which focuses on putting women's rights, gender equality and women's empowerment at the heart of global peace and security activities.

Kazakhstan is submitting its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for 2017-2018 and is particularly committed to prioritizing the protection of civilians.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to address the Security Council today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Let me start by congratulating you, Mr. President, on Uruguay's accession to membership of the Council and on its assumption of the presidency for this month, as well as by thanking you for organizing this debate and for preparing the concept note (S/2016/22, annex). I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his June 2015 report (S/2015/453) on the issue at hand and the Deputy Secretary-General for his briefing today.

Events around the world indicate that civilians are still suffering in massive numbers. Despite all the efforts at the international level, including those undertaken by the relevant humanitarian institutions,

it is most unfortunate that civilians still account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts. As the latest report of the Secretary-General indicates, over the past decade the number of people in need of international humanitarian assistance has tripled. The overwhelming majority of those people are civilians affected by armed conflict or complex emergencies, which account for about 80 per cent of the crises requiring an international humanitarian response. Approximately 42 per cent of the world's poor now live in conflict-affected and fragile States, and that figure is expected to rise to 62 per cent by 2030. Direct attacks on schools and hospitals have become common features in many armed conflicts.

NAM believes that due priority should continue to be given to the promotion of the knowledge of, respect for and observance by States of their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law, in particular those of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their 1977 Protocols.

NAM calls upon all parties to armed conflicts to redouble their efforts to comply with their legal obligations by, inter alia, prohibiting the targeting of civilian populations and civilian property and attaching priority to their responsibility to ensure general protection against the dangers arising from military operations to civilian installations, hospitals and relief materials and the means to transport and distribute such relief materials.

The Movement reiterates its condemnation of the increasing attacks on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and urges the Governments of States Members of the United Nations to ensure respect for the protection of the personnel of United Nations humanitarian organizations, in conformity with the relevant provisions of international law. At the same time, NAM emphasizes that the principles of the sovereign equality, political independence and territorial integrity of all States and of non-intervention must be upheld. The consent of a country is also imperative for granting access to humanitarian assistance on its territory and for its continued operations at all times.

United Nations missions constitute one of the most significant means at the disposal of the United Nations to protect civilians in situations of armed conflict. Since 1999, the Security Council has tasked United Nations peacekeeping missions with protection mandates, which include establishing effective early-warning mechanisms, ensuring the provision of adequate resources to monitor, prevent and respond to incidents and supporting the efforts of host country authorities to implement their responsibilities in protecting civilians. Additionally, United Nations missions assist in creating protective environments by supporting the establishment of effective rule-of-law and security institutions.

The Non-Aligned Movement stresses that United Nations peacekeeping operations, in particular those with protection-of-civilian mandates, should be guided by the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The Movement underlines that the protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of the host country. Accordingly, NAM emphasizes that the relevant peacekeeping missions with a peace mandate should conduct their tasks without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the host Government to protect civilians. We stress that the successful conduct of tasks related to the protection of civilians requires the integration of efforts at all levels and a holistic approach that encompasses the timely provision of adequate resources, logistical support and required training, as well as clearly defined and achievable mandates.

Let me conclude by expressing the hope that this open debate will provide an opportunity to assess the ways and means of providing better protection to civilians in armed conflict. We need to identify not only the positive developments made so far, but the challenges ahead. Let me once more reiterate the Non-Aligned Movement's firm belief in the importance of the protection of civilians in conflict situations, in establishing accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and in ending impunity.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General and the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their contributions to this important public debate that the Uruguayan presidency had the excellent idea of organizing. I would also like to thank Ms. Eveline Rooijmans of Oxfam for her briefing, which has informed our debate.

Luxembourg associates itself fully with the statement made by the observer of the European Union, as well as that by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

Allow me now to highlight a few points in my national capacity.

To say that international humanitarian law is not fully respected in the majority of armed conflicts that we see around the world is an understatement. The regularity with which it is being trampled on is a matter of grave concern. The disdain for the protection of civilian populations — despite the fact that this is at the very heart of international humanitarian law — is an affront to our conscience. But civilians are not only deprived of their right to be protected. It is much worse than that: in the conflicts that we see around the world, civilians are often deliberately targeted in order to spread terror and force entire populations to leave their homes.

For nearly five years, the conflict in Syria has demonstrated in all its cruelty the kind of violations to which civilian populations can be subject to. On the one hand, they are trapped between Government forces, who do not hesitate to indiscriminately bomb densely populated areas, schools and hospitals, to use barrel bombs and to try to vanquish besieged cities through famine, as the images of Madaya bear witness to so very painfully and, on the other hand, by extremist bloodthirsty groups like Daesh, which have sprung up in the course of the conflict and which attach no value to human life. About two years ago, the Security Council demanded in resolution 2139 (2014) that all sieges be immediately lifted; it demanded rapid, secure and free access to all humanitarian agencies; it recalled that to use starvation against civilians as a method of war is prohibited by international humanitarian law. Alas, almost 400,000 Syrians still live in besieged areas, over 4.5 million people live in areas difficult to access and 13.5 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance. This should not continue; this cannot continue.

We all agree that the best way to protect civilians is to do everything possible to prevent a conflict from erupting. It is therefore essential that the Security Council should make use of all the tools at its disposal in the area of prevention. Timely information should be provided to the Council by the Secretary-General, by the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect, by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and her colleague, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, in line with Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations and the Human Rights Up Front initiative. All that is extremely important.

Another key element should be the constant streamlining of peace operations. We hope that the review initiated by the Secretary-General will contribute to strengthening the capacities of United Nations peacekeeping missions, whose role in protecting civilians is essential. At the same time, a zero-tolerance policy should be implemented. Troop-contributing countries have an important role to play in ensuring that their personnel understand their responsibility in terms of protecting civilians and that they are properly trained for that task. In that context, we commend the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, established in May 2015.

Finally, as we have said more than once in the Chamber, we must bring to justice those who have committed the worst types of crimes against civilians. The fight against impunity must be at the very heart of our efforts in order to redress past wrongs and to prevent future atrocities.

The first World Humanitarian Summit, to be held in May in Istanbul, will be an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to international humanitarian law and to contribute to strengthening the protection of civilians. Let us take full advantage of that opportunity.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Lauber (Switzerland): I am pleased to take the floor on behalf of the members of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, namely, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Uruguay and my own country, Switzerland.

The Group of Friends thanks the Uruguayan presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's open debate, which is crucial to keeping the protection of civilians high on the agenda. We also thank the Deputy Secretary-General, the Vice-President of

the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the representative of Oxfam for their briefings this morning. We particularly welcome the initiative of the presidency to invite representatives of those two very important non-governmental organizations to participate in today's meeting.

As noted by the Secretary-General and by the President of the ICRC in their joint warning on 31 October 2015, the world is a turning point, and we must react vigorously to a growing lack of respect for international humanitarian law and the disregard for the protection of civilians in many conflicts. We cannot be indifferent to the immense human suffering caused by armed conflicts, and its consequences for international peace and security. The international community must reaffirm the principles related to the protection of civilians as enshrined in international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law, as well as in international criminal law. Parties to conflict must be reminded time and again that even wars have rules and that those rules apply to all.

The latest report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians (S/2015/453) is a stark reminder that we need to continue our collective efforts to address the challenges posed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Indiscriminate attacks on civilians have become a recurrent feature in many contemporary conflicts. Schools and medical facilities are not spared. Complex and dynamic security environments, as well as access restrictions applied to humanitarian workers, impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance. A growing number of parties to armed conflicts openly disregard the validity of long-established rules of international humanitarian law. For example, respect for the obligations governing the conduct of hostilities, including distinction, proportionality and precaution, as well as the prohibition on deliberately targeting civilians and civilian objects, is eroding, including in situations under the consideration of the Council.

All too often the lack of respect for the most basic principles of humanity goes hand-in-hand with a pervasive climate of impunity and utter lack of redress for victims. We therefore must insist on bringing to justice those responsible for the most serious crimes of international concern. The Security Council is uniquely positioned to promote peace and justice. We call upon the Council to make use of its numerous options to promote and ensure accountability. That includes standing up to reported atrocities, establishing facts and the truth about alleged violations, making referrals to the International Criminal Court and following up thereon, staying firm on addressing accountability for past crimes in all situations and tasking peacekeeping operations, within their respective mandates, to support the fight against impunity.

The Security Council must demonstrate its leadership and systematically and vigorously endeavour to uphold the core protection of civilian standards whenever the need arises. In that regard, the Group of Friends welcome the Council's presidential statement on the protection of civilians of 25 November 2015 (S/PRST/2015/23), which reaffirms its commitment regarding the protection of civilians and its intention to continue to review the issue regularly. The Group of Friends welcomes in particular the reques madet of the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Council every 12 months, which is an important step towards more frequent reporting about the protection of civilians to the Council. The aide-memoire contained in the annex to the presidential statement is an excellent instrument for the implementation of the protection of civilians, and should be used in a more systematic manner by all the relevant stakeholders.

Ensuring better respect for international humanitarian law remains the key challenge for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. At the thirty-second International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, held in Geneva in December 2015, consensus was reached on a number of pressing issues and possible ways to address them. They include sexual and gender-biased violence, the protection of the delivery of health care, the protection of persons deprived of their liberty and compliance with international humanitarian law. With regard to the latter, we regret the lack of willingness to comit to a more expeditious and more resolute way forward. However, the International Conference recognized the gaps and the weaknesses in the implementation of international humanitarian law and the need to address them. It paved the way for an intergovernmental process to find agreement on the functions and features of a potential forum of States on international humanitarian law and ways to enhance the implementation of international humanitarian law using the potential of the International Conference and the regional international humanitarian law forums. We expect all Governments to engage constructively and in good faith in that intergovernmental process, to be co-facilitated by Switzerland and the ICRC.

The Group of Friends welcomes the recommendations of the Secretary-General contained in his report entitled "The future of the United Nations peace operations: implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/682), as well as the recommendations of the report of the Panel on peace operations with respect to the protection of civilians (see S/2015/446). The review presents a key opportunity to strengthen the capacity of United Nations peace operations to leverage all their components, including civil affairs, to effectively protect civilians. We look forward to engaging on how to achieve that end. Political engagement and support for political settlements should be seen as an integral part of this effort. The best way to protect civilians is by preventing armed conflict in the first instance and, failing that, by ending armed conflict through a negotiated and inclusive settlement.

The Group of Friends fully supports the call by the Secretary-General for the Council to bring its collective political leverage to bear on behalf of political solutions. The Group of Friends also takes note of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, adopted in May 2015, aimed at reinforcing the protection of civilians by troop- and police-contributing countries in the framework of peacekeeping operations. The Group of Friends highlights the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse as being ever-more relevant in the light of recent allegations, particularly in the Central African Republic. We welcome the Secretary-General's efforts to strengthen the United Nations response and call on Member States, including troop- and police-contributing countries, to do the same.

In May 2016, the world will gather in Istanbul for the first-ever World Humanitarian Aummit. The Summit should pave the way for more coherent and vigorous action for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We call upon all Member States to seize that event as a unique opportunity to reaffirm the importance of ensuring respect for international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law. We further call on Member States and relevant actors to continue their efforts to ensure the centrality of protection in humanitarian action, including gender considerations and the protection of other vulnerable groups. That will require political commitment, strong leadership, effective coordination, extensive capacity-building efforts and systematic monitoring, reporting and follow-up of protection issues by us all.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Schieb (Germany): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate on a topical issue, and I would like to thank the briefers for sharing their valuable insights with us.

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union and with the statement just delivered by Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

On a daily basis, we are confronted with horrific news about killed, wounded, maimed, raped and tortured civilians. Almost 60 million people worldwide are displaced. Many of them have fled from violence. It is a sad fact: civilians pay the highest price in any armed conflict. An aggravating cause of the suffering of civilians is the shocking disrespect for the relevant international law by many parties to armed conflicts. Terrorist groups like the Islamic State in Syria and the Levant, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab target civilians on purpose in order to demoralize their opponents. And in some instances, even States do not refrain from such abhorrent tactics either, as has been demonstrated by the Syrian Government's use of devastating barrel bombs against its own people.

The deliberate blocking of humanitarian aid, indiscriminate attacks on residential areas, markets and schools, starvation of civilians as a method of combat and even the use of poison gas, the killing and torturing of prisoners as well as enforced disappearances — all this has become a cynical trademark of the Syrian conflict, which for too long has been plaguing the civilian population. It is not just a question of non-State armed groups flagrantly violating international humanitarian and human rights law; States' awareness of their obligation to comply with these legal regimes also needs to be strengthened. The prevailing lack of accountability further fuels the disrespect for international law in conflicts.

It has been expressed by other speakers before me but it cannot be reiterated often enough — the international community must redouble its efforts to strengthen compliance with international law by parties to conflict. With its unique mandate and power, the

Security Council has a primordial role to play in this respect. The world expects the Council to take action when civilians are slaughtered in conflicts or when their life and health are in danger and to bring those who are responsible for these acts to justice, if other mechanisms fail. At the same time, it is evident that our priority must remain to prevent crimes against civilians in the first place, and we should continue to spare no efforts in doing so.

Germany welcomes the efforts to improve the protection of civilians in conflicts throughout the United Nations system. The reports of the Secretary-General on the future of peacekeeping, his regular reports on the protection of civilians and the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446) provide valuable guidance to that effect. In this context, I would also like to express our continued support for the Secretary-General's Human Rights up Front initiative.

Ten peacekeeping missions already have mandates to protect civilians. In one of them, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), protection of civilians has become a particularly pressing issue. The challenges are tremendous, the environment is complex and the resources are limited. Some 1.6 million people are internally displaced and around 200,000 have found protection in the Mission's bases. Germany welcomes the comprehensive and inclusive approach by UNMISS designed to better protect civilians. The promotion of dialogue and the engagement with local communities at the grass roots level are crucial elements of reducing tensions and violence. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the UNMISS staff for their dedication and tireless work aimed at keeping the civilian population safe.

A particularly repugnant aspect of many armed conflicts is the use of sexual and gender-based violence as tactics of warfare. This is, unfortunately, also the case in South Sudan. Germany strongly supports the special attention that UNMISS attaches to these crimes, which have such a disastrous effect on societies. Assaults on the physical and psychological well-being of women and their dignity cannot be tolerated anywhere in the world. We are glad that, since October 2015, we, Germany, have been able to contribute highly specialized police officers to a team that will help UNMISS and the South Sudanese society fight sexual and gender-based violence.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming the unfailing German commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. As in the past, it will remain one of our main priorities.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): Mr. President, we greatly value the partnership Australia has had with Uruguay over the past seven years on the protection of civilians, and we welcome your leadership on this issue in your first month on the Council.

As the human cost for civilians caught up in conflict continues to climb, we must take every opportunity to press for stronger action, both armed and unarmed, to protect civilians. There is no one solution for the protection of civilians. The United Nations must use all of the tools at its disposal to ensure a comprehensive approach to protection across its security, political and aid efforts. Australia is deeply concerned by the blatant lack of compliance with international humanitarian law by many parties to conflict. Existing mechanisms for ensuring compliance are insufficient.

Australia was deeply disappointed that States failed to agree on a mechanism to strengthen compliance at the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December. There is an obvious need for a dedicated forum for an exchange between States on compliance with international humanitarian law. We urge all States to work towards this end in good faith.

Central to protecting civilians is the obligation to provide for their needs, including by ensuring the provision of humanitarian aid. Systematic and widespread efforts to impede the delivery of life-saving aid through the denial of humanitarian access has become a deplorable feature of today's conflicts. We welcome the provision of essential health and food supplies to four besieged areas in Syria last week as a positive step. However, full, unconditional and sustained access to all people in need must be granted immediately by all parties throughout the country, in particular the Syrian Government. The practice of besieging civilians to induce starvation is inhumane and unlawful. All such sieges must end immediately.

Where peacekeeping missions have an explicit mandate to protect civilians, uniformed personnel must play their part, including, where necessary, through the use of force. Robust peacekeeping is an essential

tool at the Council's disposal to protect civilians. The Council must receive timely conflict trend analysis and real-time analysis on the protection needs in country situations. Unarmed civilian capacities of peacekeeping operations must be reinforced to support this effort.

As highlighted by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, information-sharing is essential for developing tailored peace operations mandates, improving force generation and ensuring that those who commit serious violations are held accountable. The international community must also do more to support effective political processes that promote peaceful and inclusive societies and enable Governments to fulfil their responsibility to protect their civilian populations.

Finally, ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit, we call on the Secretary-General to detail clear, precise actions for all actors to take to enhance the protection of civilians and compliance with international law. Action to protect civilians is at the heart of the work of the United Nations. We must use all the tools at our disposal — political, humanitarian, security and economic development — to reinforce the sanctity and centrality of protecting civilians in conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Buffin (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium thanks Uruguay, President of the Security Council, for organizing today's open debate today as well as the various speakers for their contributions. Current events have unfortunately shown the relevance of and need for this debate.

Belgium fully supports the statement made by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, as well as the statement to be made later by the observer of the European Union.

I would like to raise two points in my national capacity. First, Belgium welcomes the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations. As part of the open debate today, I wish to express my country's full and complete support for the work of the Secretary-General in implementing these recommendations, in particular those in relation to the protection of civilians. In this context, I think it useful to quote the following passage of the report of the High-level Independent Panel:

> "The United Nations must not stand by as civilians are threatened or killed: missions must demonstrate the determination to use every tool available to protect civilians under imminent threat." (*S/2015/446, para. 92*)

Secondly, Belgium fully supports the recommendations of the Secretary-General in each of the areas dealt with in his report of 18 June 2015 (S/2015/453), namely, strengthening respect for international law; humanitarian access; the use of explosive devices in populated areas; the identification and registration of civilian casualties; displaced persons; and the role of the Security Council on the protection of civilians.

I now wish to address three specific aspects of these recommendations.

First, concerning humanitarian access, the appalling images and testimony coming out of Madaya, where hundreds of people are literally starving, are a reminder to us of just how tragic the situation of the civilian population in Syria is. In the meantime, the Syrian authorities have decided to grant humanitarian access to the city, and initial deliveries of humanitarian aid are beginning to reach the endangered populations.

We call on the parties to the conflict to ensure humanitarian access to the entire civilian population and under no circumstances to use the practice of siege, in accordance with their obligations under international law.

Humanitarian access, as well as the protection of medical infrastructure, must remain a priority of the Security Council. This message was conveyed by Belgium during its presidency of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Donor Support Group in 2015, through support for the Health Care in Danger initiative, and by its sending, in January 2014, a letter from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, endorsed by 28 ministers, reminding all parties to the conflict in Syria of their obligations to respect international humanitarian law concerning access to health care and thereby facilitate the work of humanitarian actors.

Secondly, concerning prevention, Blue Helmets have a duty to intervene when civilians are at risk, using force if necessary. Alongside this obligation, a great deal of prevention work must be done within United Nations operations in terms of the training of peacekeepers prior to deployment, and through

exchanges with host countries. The United Nations and its Member States must ensure that the necessary means are also made available for these essential tasks.

The preventive dimension is multifaceted and calls for the strengthening of many links in the chain of operations of peacekeeping missions so that they can give due attention to the protection of civilians. The joint action plan developed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Field Support provides a solid basis in this regard. We urge the Secretary-General to report regularly on the progress made and the difficulties encountered in the implementation thereof.

Thirdly, concerning the fight against impunity, we must ensure that the perpetrators of the most serious crimes against civilians are held accountable for their actions. I wish to recall the need for the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. Like the Secretary-General, Belgium calls on all States Members of the United Nations to ratify the Rome Statute. We also call on them to support the Agreement on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Criminal Court, which is an indispensable tool for the proper functioning of the Court.

On the other hand, I believe it necessary to acknowledge the efforts of the Government of the Central African Republic in setting up a Special Criminal Court, supported by the United Nations Development Programme and DPKO. The fact that the Security Council has mandated the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) to facilitate the operations of the Special Criminal Court, especially in its operational activities, is a very positive development. I call on the Security Council and Member States to continue supporting this instrument and ensuring support by MINUSCA for the day-to-day work of the Special Criminal Court.

Finally, we have the issue of the criminal liability of peacekeepers and of United Nations officials and experts on mission. On 6 January, new cases of sexual abuse in the Central African Republic were reported; this time it appears that they were committed by MINUSCA soldiers. The United Nations must lead by example and do its utmost so that this kind of event does not recur. We welcome the efforts made by the Secretary-General in this respect, encourage him to continue in this vein, and call on Member States to provide all necessary assistance.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Alhakim (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, I would like to begin by congratulating your country, Uruguay, on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and I wish you the greatest success in your work. I should like also to thank the delegation of the United States for its work during its presidency of the Council last month.

The protection of civilians and their property as well as that of civilian facilities in cases of armed conflict is a common ethical and legal obligation. This responsibility entails not targeting civilian installations during times of war or conflict. Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham fighters are systematically and intensively targeting innocent, defenceless civilians in the following ways: summary executions, sexual violence, kidnapping, trafficking in women and children, rape, the recruitment of child soldiers by force, the desecration of religious sites and places of worship, the sacking and destruction of cultural property, and attacks on fundamental freedoms. Such groups use the civilian population as human shields in fighting the security and military forces.

Iraq and its partners are waging war against terrorism. But we are also committed to ensuring the protection of civilians, in other words, respecting their rights and their property, in accordance with international humanitarian law. We wish to spare civilians the dangers of war and the impact of combat operations. We seek to prevent harm from coming to them by opening safe corridors to evacuate them from combat zones at opportune times. That is what we did in Tikrit, Beiji and Ramadi recently, evacuating 3,700 families under siege.

Security, military and air forces are urgently called upon to target only hostile military targets with the greatest precision. We are looking to open centres for displaced persons and provide them with housing, food and medical care while the areas from which they were evacuated are liberated from terrorist groups, and to facilitate their return following reconstruction.

We are committed to protecting civilians, and the Government of Iraq is working to provide care to the victims of terrorist operations and compensate

those who have suffered losses as a result of military operations.

Daesh has committed reprehensible actions against women, children, civilians, the elderly, minority populations, indeed all components of Iraqi society, to whom the necessary assistance must be extended during the war against terrorism. Iraq calls on the entire world and the forces of the international coalition and their partners in the war against terrorism to help us as quickly as possible and in a stable manner to counter terrorist groups. We must also facilitate the return of displaced persons and the reconstruction of the infrastructure of those cities that have been destroyed.

Iraq thanks the international humanitarian organizations for the assistance provided to displaced Iraqi civilians. Those organizations should continue to work with Iraq to provide for the humanitarian and medical needs of wounded Iraqi civilians.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. AlJarallah (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on Uruguay's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I would also like to reiterate my congratulations to the delegations of Uruguay, Japan, Ukraine, Senegal and the sister delegation of Egypt, which represents the Arab countries, and wish them all success. I would also like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Jan Eliasson; the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ms. Christine Beerli; and Ms. Eveline Rooijmans of Oxfam for their important briefings on a challenging issue facing the international community, namely the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The crises in the world today bear troubling witness to the increased suffering of civilians in conflict. There are over 60 million displaced persons, in addition to an increasing number of people in need of international humanitarian assistance, the majority of whom are civilians affected by armed conflict and complex emergency situations. We should act decisively to engage the parties to conflict with respect to their responsibilities to civilians, in order to make it possible for humanitarian access to reach the affected civilians and put an end to the violations of the Charter of the United Nations and of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We should also work to strengthen international mechanisms, criminalize prohibited acts and ensure that the relevant courts are seized of those actions for which perpetrators should be held accountable. Impunity is not an option; therein lies the importance of the issue under consideration.

Since the issue of the protection of civilians was placed on the Council's agenda in 1999, the Council has adopted a number of resolutions and presidential statements on the topic, the most recent of which is resolution 2249 (2015). Adopted last November, the resolution reaffirms the Council's commitment to resolutions on the protection of civilians. But despite all of the resolutions, statements and efforts by the United Nations and its relevant bodies worldwide to protect civilians, the international community has been unable to ensure that protection. On the contrary, we have seen an increase in tragedies, massacres, displacement and migration. Disagreements among the permanent members of the Council and the use of the veto have increased, further complicating the issue, while the violations continue.

We cannot discuss the protection of civilians without considering the suffering of the unarmed Palestinian people. During the more than 60 years of occupation, aggression, repression, injustice and arrest, all of which contravene the essential foundations of international humanitarian law, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued its violations, defying the international community and international human rights law and international humanitarian law. That situation calls for rapid action by the Council with a view to ensuring international protection for the unarmed Palestinian people.

The Syrian crisis is the most severe humanitarian crisis of modern times, with over a quarter of a million victims and millions of displaced Syrians. Daily news broadcasts have exposed the plight of the besieged Syrian city of Madaya as well as other cities where the Syrian people have been subjected to famine. The Secretary-General of the United Nations has affirmed that the use of starvation as a weapon during conflict is a war crime. The Council must therefore put an end to that crisis and the human rights violations there.

The protection of civilians requires that we ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The United Nations is preparing for the fourth conference on the humanitarian situation in Syria. The conference will be held in London on 4 February 2016 and will be co-chaired by the United Kingdom, Norway, Germany and Kuwait. It is a follow-up to the efforts of the three

earlier conferences in Kuwait, at which we were able to gather $7 billion, $1.3 billion of which were pledged by Kuwait. The London conference on Syria is a new challenge, as it presents an opportunity to address the long-term needs of all those suffering from the conflict in Syria, to set up new areas for work and education, and, above all, to promote engagement and encourage all stakeholders to protect civilians and alleviate their suffering. We stress the need for active participation in that conference and hope that that humanitarian effort will be supported by political will in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), allowing us to resolve that humanitarian tragedy and bring an end to the suffering of our Syrian brothers, both domestically and abroad.

The actions of Houthi militias and the partisan forces of former President Saleh, who insists on using force to return to power, pose a direct threat to the security of the States of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and have led to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Yemen. The ongoing siege of the Governorate of Taiz is an example of how the delivery of humanitarian access to civilians has been obstructed and of how extensive the far-reaching humanitarian crisis in Yemen is. The Houthi militias and partisan forces of former President Saleh are contravening resolution 2216 (2015), which calls for a political solution to the conflict. In that context, we call for the re-establishment of peace, security and stability for the people of Yemen, a brotherly nation, in accordance with Council resolutions.

In conclusion, we reiterate our support for the role of the United Nations in the protection of civilians in armed conflict, in particular through peacekeeping missions, which must act in accordance with clear mandates. We stress the importance of this debate, as the issue is a crucial aspect of the Council's action. The Council must take the necessary steps to protect civilians in armed conflict and hold accountable those who violate international humanitarian law.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Barriga (Liechtenstein): The joint warning issued by the Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross on 31 October 2015 leaves no doubt that disrespect for the well-being of civilians in armed conflict has reached unprecedented levels, reminiscent of the Dark Ages. Families are starving in besieged towns, patients are being killed by bombs in their hospital beds, and there have been unprecedented levels of sexual violence and attacks on humanitarian workers — these are not just clear violations of international humanitarian law, but are, simply, barbarities.

Shockingly, not all of such acts and strategies can be ascribed to extremists, rebels and non-State actors; some of them fall squarely within the responsibility of States. How can we expect non-State actors to comply with at least the basic tenets of international humanitarian law when even States parties to the Geneva Conventions fail to do so? The discrepancy between the success of the Geneva Conventions on paper and the dramatic erosion of their respect in practice has become intolerable.

Discussions about international humanitarian law sometimes get stuck in arguments about its relevance in the light of the technological advances of the arms industry, yet much of the suffering of innocent civilians today arises from rather old-fashioned forms of military action. In all too many cases, there is no need to resort to sophisticated legal arguments to conclude that a certain act amounted to a serious violation of international humanitarian law. Clearly, lack of compliance with the most basic rules of international humanitarian law is its greatest problem today. We therefore regret that the recent International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent was not able to agree on more concrete measures to improve compliance.

The proposals on the table were already extremely modest and designed to accommodate the concerns of some opposing States. We therefore encourage Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as facilitators of the process, to remain steadfast. However, we cannot wait another four years in the current situation of crisis. Complementary steps for enhancing compliance have to be considered urgently, both in the Council and outside. We also hope that the World Humanitarian Summit will give a boost to these efforts.

In any armed conflict, the protection of civilians is first and foremost the responsibility and legal obligation of parties to a conflict, and thus primarily of the States and non-State actors involved. At the same time, the Council, and in particular United Nations peace operations on the ground also have an important role to play. We generally support the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations,

but we were surprised that the report stayed clear of one important dimension — accountability.

Bringing perpetrators of war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law to justice is crucial to help deter future crimes, end cycles of impunity and address the rights of victims. United Nations peace operations can do much in the fight against impunity, including by supporting domestic, hybrid or international accountability and truth-finding mechanisms. In particular, United Nations peace operations could do much more to support the work of the International Criminal Court. That will also require greater commitment on the part of the Council itself to the fight against impunity, and more principled, concrete action, for example by referring situations such as those in Syria and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the to the ICC, and by ensuring the necessary follow-up.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to remind Council members, as well as non-members, that they are invited to join the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes. One hundred and nine States, including eight current members of the Council have already done so. The code is a strong expression of the commitment of the supporting States to actively contributing to timely and decisive Security Council action to prevent or end mass atrocities. We are strongly encouraged by the positive response of the membership to the initiative and are confident that the list will continue to grow. The code also reflects the conviction that the protection of civilians is not just another thematic issue for the Council to deal with, but a core responsibility of the Council. We therefore call on all Council members to deploy much greater efforts, to engage with a greater spirit of cooperation, and to live up to that responsibility for the sake of innocent men, women and children trapped in conflict everywhere.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of the observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I will deliver a short version of my statement. However, a copy of the longer version will be circulated to members of the Security Council.

We congratulate Uruguay on its membership of the Security Council and presidency this month, and on having convened today's important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

We meet at a critical moment witnessing the immense suffering of millions of civilians in conflicts around the world, particularly in the Middle East, where civilians are bearing the highest toll of armed conflict in all forms, including foreign occupation. That toll has compelled the largest movement of refugees since the Second World War, with grave humanitarian, social, economic, psychological and security consequences for the children, women and men whose fate it is to become refugees, as well as for the countries in conflict, receiving countries and the international community as a whole.

The Palestinian people — including the 5.5 million Palestine refugees who constitute the most protracted refugee crisis in the world — know all too well the pain and tragedy of such turmoil and dislocation as they continue to suffer the injustices of the 1948 Nakba and to endure the brutality of Israel's illegal, belligerent occupation for nearly a half century. Their suffering persists due not only to the failure to achieve a just solution to the conflict, despite countless United Nations resolutions, but also to the international community's failure to uphold international humanitarian law in the face of grave breaches and to ensure the protection of civilians until such a solution has been realized.

The intent of those who drafted the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols was clear. It was to ensure protection to civilians in situations of armed conflict and minimize their vulnerability and suffering. Yet, the tragedy of civilians in armed conflict persists due to lack of respect for international humanitarian law in too many circumstances and the failure to hold accountable the perpetrators of violations and grave breaches, including Israel, the occupying Power, which continues to cause harm and suffering to the Palestinian people with absolute impunity.

We have repeatedly appealed for protection for the Palestinian people, not just in the recent period but over the decades as our people have endured immeasurable oppression and cruelty under Israeli occupation, including the killing and injury of civilians in military raids, air strikes, bombardments and terror attacks across the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, detention, imprisonment, abuse and torture, forced displacement and transfer, an illegal blockade and other severe measures of collective punishment. The deplorable situation is corroborated by numerous United Nations reports, including the Secretary-General's recent annual report on children and armed

conflict (S/2015/409), which documents the devastating impact of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian children and their extreme vulnerability. Yet, over the decades and despite the Security Council's own calls for protection, Palestinian civilians have been deprived of effective protection from such systematic violations and crimes.

As far back as 1987, the Security Council, in resolution 605 (1987), took into account "the need to consider measures for the impartial protection of the Palestinian civilian population under Israeli occupation" and requested the Secretary-General to examine the situation and report "on ways and means for ensuring the safety and protection of the Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation". Regrettably, the recommendations contained in the report of 21 January 1988 (S/19443) were never implemented due to Israel's rejection of resolution 605 (1987) and the lack of political will to hold it to account and insist on its respect for international humanitarian law, to ensure protection of the civilians under its occupation.

Resolution 605 (1987) was followed by other relevant resolutions calling for respect for international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular resolution 904 (1994), in which the Council, expressing grave concern at the Palestinian casualties and underlining "the need to provide protection and security for the Palestinian people", called for

> "measures to be taken to guarantee the safety and protection of the Palestinian civilians throughout the occupied territory, including, inter alia, a temporary international or foreign presence" (*resolution 904 (1994), para. 3*).

Reaffirmations of the obligations of the occupying Power under international humanitarian law, including the obligation to ensure the safety and well-being of the Palestinian civilian population, were repeatedly made thereafter by the Council, the General Assembly, conferences of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention and successive United Nations High Commissioners for Human Rights, including Ms. Mary Robinson, who in 2001 stressed that,

> "[t]he protection of the victim should be the overriding concern of the United Nations and its agencies and programmes .... Protection needs to be accorded to the people of the occupied territories in strict compliance with the Fourth Geneva Convention".

All of that has been to no avail. Although the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, a small, unarmed international civilian contingent, was deployed in 1997 and continues to provide a limited protective presence in the city, the violations faced by Palestinian civilians have never ceased and continue to the present day, only with greater intensity and impunity. The impact of the violations on civilians has been immense, with countless lives ruined and generations lost, underscoring the need for the enhanced and effective protection of the Palestinian people. The international community has clear responsibilities, particularly the Council and the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, which must be upheld. Protection should not be viewed as unreasonable or unimaginable by any party that respects the law and human rights and seeks peace. Civilians — children, women and men — must not be used as cannon fodder, and all efforts must be made to spare them the atrocities of war and protect their lives.

The United Nations special responsibilities were underscored, inter alia, in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, which stresses that

> "[t]he protection of civilians in armed conflict is a core principle of international humanitarian law and a moral responsibility for the United Nations" (*S/2015/446, para. 82*),

and decries the systemic constraints, including the lack of consensus among Security Council members, that have prevented United Nations action in efforts to address the protection needs of civilians in many conflicts.

In that connection, we also highlight the essential role that can be played by humanitarian organizations, as well as civil society, in providing a protective civilian presence. In Palestine, we recognize the important contributions, in that regard, made by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other United Nations agencies providing assistance and protection to the most vulnerable, including children, and the work of civil society. The latter includes, for example, a programme run by the World Council of Churches that provides protective escorts for our civilians, and we urgently call for the enhancement of such efforts. We

call on the Secretary-General, in particular, to urgently explore and mobilize United Nations capabilities in that regard, in line with international humanitarian law.

Moreover, the United Nations study reviewing protection regimes (S/2015/809, annex), which was requested of the Secretary-General by President Mahmoud Abbas and which was presented by the Secretary-General to the Security Council in October, provides important precedents that should be fully considered, along with other relevant reports aimed at strengthening the Council's ability to address protection needs in conflicts throughout the world. That study, containing several dozen pages, was not circulated to the members of the Security Council for them to shelve away. It was circulated rather for them to study, consider and draw conclusions with regard to practical steps to provide protection for the Palestinian people. For the Palestinian people, that call is more urgent than ever in an unsustainable and dangerous situation that continues to require sustained international attention and action. We implore the international community, and foremost the Security Council, to rise to the challenge and act to protect civilians and uphold human rights in Palestine and everywhere else in the world, where innocent civilians are suffering in conflicts, and to restore credibility to international humanitarian law and to the Council itself.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statements to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and by the spokesperson for the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, and wishes to add the following remarks in its national capacity on this timely initiative, for which we praise your presidency.

The deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, is on the rise. Italy has endorsed the Safe School Declaration on the use of schools by armed forces and non-State armed groups in contravention of applicable international law. Sustained humanitarian access remains a key challenge. The number of refugees and internally displaced persons has reached record levels. Impunity for violations remains, unfortunately, very high. Those are the challenges that we are up against.

Against that background, Italy welcomes the recent report on the topic by the Secretary-General (S/2015/453) and the adoption, under the United Kingdom presidency of the Security Council, of presidential statement S/PRST/2015/23, reaffirming the Council's commitment to that cause, and looks forward to the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul as a platform to reinforce our collective engagement, which Italy demonstrates every day in the rescue operations involving migrants and refugees coming from across the Mediterranean. Allow me to highlight a few points.

First, there are the issues of accountability and compliance. It is important that the Council systematically remind parties to a conflict of their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights and refugee law, and systematically condemn violations of the existing norms. In that respect, Italy supports proposals to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law, including through a forum in which States could engage in a more systematic, non-politicized and voluntary dialogue. Moreover, I wish to stress the importance of the International Criminal Court as an essential institution in strengthening the message that there can be no impunity. We believe that the Council should have a forum in which issues of international criminal justice and accountability could be regularly and more broadly discussed, bearing in mind the differing sensitivities at hand, but also the need to assist domestic efforts to strengthen local judicial institutions.

Secondly, there is the issue of humanitarian access and needs. In coordination with the Emergency Relief Coordinator, it is important for the Council to systematically remind parties to a conflict of their obligations to guarantee rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access, and to condemn the denial of such access without fail. It is also important to empower local communities and civil society, which play a primary role in delivering aid and advocating for humanitarian values. We must also remember that women, children and people with disabilities most often bear the brunt of armed conflict, and we must therefore never lose sight of their specific needs. Allow me, in that context, to recall Italy's most recent contribution to the World Food Programme, last week, in the delivery of essential food items to the besieged population of Syria, including the town of Madaya.

Thirdly, with regard to peacekeeping operations, Italy welcomes the recommendations contained in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on

Peace Operations (S/2015/446) and recognizes that the protection of civilians is a mission-wide task. To fulfil it, many non-military tools are available, including strong political advocacy, credible reporting, and liaison with local communities. Training prior to deployment is also essential, including on issues of sexual exploitation and abuse. Italy is fully supportive of the United Nations zero-tolerance policy in that regard.

Prevention is not only the right choice, it is the better choice. Negotiated political solutions to conflicts, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1) to tackle root causes, the preventive power of justice, the renewed focus on prevention and mediation by strengthening United Nations capacities, including in terms of financial resources, are the best ways to guarantee effective protection of civilians. I therefore stress the importance of early-warning mechanisms, such as the *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes* of the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect. I welcome continued reporting to the Council on those issues.

In conclusion, I wish to recall the adoption, upon the initiative of the Government of Rwanda, of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians. Italy is among the inaugural subscribers to that voluntary set of principles, which establish that the effective protection of civilians in peacekeeping requires properly trained troops, adequate equipment and strong political commitment. We are confident that a greater number of troop- and police-contributing countries will subscribe to and implement the Principles.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): At the outset, I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's thematic debate. It underscores the pivotal importance of the issue, especially as civilians have come to represent the ever-increasing proportion of victims in ongoing armed conflicts — in an era that the Secretary-General recently aptly portrayed as one of mega-crises. My delegation also appreciates the insightful briefings by the Deputy Secretary-General and by the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The suffering of civilians caught in the line of fire in conflict situations is unspeakable. Tens of thousands of people, including women, children and the elderly, have become tragic victims of conflicts not of their making. Civilian casualties have mounted, and so has the need for humanitarian assistance. The United Nations report released today reveals that in Iraq's ongoing conflict nearly 19,000 civilians were killed between 1 January 2014 and 31 October 2015, with more than 36,000 wounded. Those are indeed staggering numbers. Millions have been dislodged from their homes, driven out by bloody and unremitting conflict and unending turmoil or persecution. Many who managed to flee have seen their perilous journeys of escape become journeys of death.

The protection of civilians is a core system-wide responsibility, but host countries bear the primary responsibility for the protection of all civilians without discrimination. A normative framework is in place, and the international community keeps urging all parties to comply with their obligations and abide by international humanitarian law and human rights law. But compliance, unfortunately, is sporadic at best, and defiance remains rampant, especially, but not only, on the part of non-State actors. As recent examples attest, starvation has been used as an instrument of a siege strategy, and indiscriminate bombing campaigns have been undertaken with no regard for the loss of civilian lives. The destruction of hospitals and attacks on medical workers has been the most egregious example of such impunity. All that has presented formidable obstacles to legitimate humanitarian access to affected populations and resulted in death and destruction, which could have been avoided. We would therefore fully support efforts to strengthen compliance and accountability measures.

The attention given to the subject in the report of the High-level Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) is also timely. We support its recommendations for better training of peacekeepers and closer trilateral dialogue and collaboration. We do, however, believe that the fundamental principles of peacekeeping are not an impediment to protection-of-civilians mandates. The Security Council establishes those mandates, and the use of force in defence of those mandates is an integral part of those principles. The report also urges extreme caution when mandating enforcement tasks.

Pakistan, as one of world's top troop-contributing countries, has proudly and conscientiously undertaken the task of proactively protecting civilians, when mandated by the Council. We have demonstrated that this can be done by a robust deterrence posture and

without resort to the actual use of force. Action by Pakistani troops in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur offers an example of the active protection of civilians while adhering to the principles of peacekeeping.

While we appreciate the acknowledgement in the Secretary-General's report that Pakistan's counter-terrorism operations involves "better advance planning to limit the effect on civilians" (*S/2015/453, para. 20*), my delegation reiterates that these are law enforcement actions and do not constitute a situation of armed conflict. We of course strongly condemn the deliberate targeting of civilians in conflict situations. We have even temporarily relocated civilians to protect them from deliberate targeting by terrorists in areas where law enforcement operations are taking place. As has been demonstrated time and again, terrorists are not bound by any consideration of humanity. The have not even spared schoolchildren, as the cowardly attack on a school in Peshawar demonstrated a year ago, underlining the new and appalling levels of inhumanity to which violent extremists have sunk. Even so, the response of States to combat terrorism must be measured, well-planned and carefully targeted to protect civilias and uphold human rights. Anything less would play into the hands of terrorists and would be counter-productive.

Finally, the goal of the protection of civilians is best served, as other speakers before me have also pointed out, by preventing the outbreak of armed conflicts in the first place, addressing the root causes of conflicts and finding inclusive and peaceful political solutions to disputes and conflicts. That, we believe, is the strategy that will lead us to sustained and enduring peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Brother Carroll (Holy See): My delegation wishes to thank the presidency of Uruguay for bringing the question of the protection of civilians in armed conflict to the attention of the international community.

One of the saddest developments in the evolution of armed conflicts is that more and more victims are innocent civilians. In the early 1900s, approximately 5 per cent of such fatalities were civilians, while in the 1990s, more than 90 per cent of the fatalities were non-combatants. It continues to worsen. All the reports and studies on the theme during the past six months, in particular the June 2015 report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2015/453), unanimously affirm that the deliberate targeting of, and indiscriminate attacks on, civilians continue to increase.

The consequences are there for the whole world to see: huge civilian casualties, including many children; massive population displacements; the refugee and migration crisis; the intentional destruction of civilian infrastructure, such as schools and medical facilities; the use of civilians as weapons of war by depriving them, inter alia, of food and other basic necessities; the total disregard for the safety of humanitarian workers and journalists; and other clear violations of international humanitarian law.

The whole international community is implicated in those heinous crimes in one way or another by silence and indifference, for instance, or by the fact that the destruction of civilian infrastructure and the slaughter of innocent civilians are perpetrated with weapons manufactured and supplied by the industrial engines of the world and sold on the open or black market or given or loaned to client States. The extent of responsibility goes well beyond those directly massacring civilians.

Nobody can remain indifferent before this tragedy. We must act with the utmost urgency. First, this barbarity must be denounced by all without exception and in the strongest possible terms. Secondly, the international community must do all it can to stop these heinous crimes, including the legitimate use of force to stop atrocities and war crimes. Thirdly, the tools at the disposal of the Council and of the international community to protect civilians in armed conflict and bring perpetrators to justice must be enhanced and further strengthened where necessary. Fourthly, the international community and individual States must have the will and readiness to use those tools. Fifthly, those responsible must be held accountable. Sixthly, civilian populations who have been affected by mass atrocities and war crimes deserve all the help we can and must provide.

Pope Francis, in his 11 January address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, gave voice to the victims of wars, saying:

> "We hear Rachel weeping for her children who are no more. Hers is the plea of thousands of people who weep as they flee horrific wars, persecutions and human rights violations, or political or social

instability, which often make it impossible for them to live in their native lands. It is the outcry of those forced to flee in order to escape unspeakable acts of cruelty towards the most vulnerable persons, such as women and children and the disabled, or martyrdom solely on account of their religion."

In the name of Pope Francis, my delegation wishes to convey profound gratitude to the countries, communities and individuals who are extending the hands of solidarity and fraternity in the midst of so much human suffering. The Pope explicitly thanks Lebanon and Jordan, as well as the frontline countries of Italy, Greece and Turkey, for all their efforts and commitments to save lives and ease this horrendous suffering. Those countries need the help of the entire international community to face the challenges posed by massive movements of refugees and migrants.

There is a panoply of interdependent problems that can only be resolved by establishing peace through dialogue and negotiations. We are encouraged by progress towards finding political solutions to some of the most violent conflicts in the Middle East. Care for the civilians caught in the crossfire and used as weapons of war calls for full support for ongoing dialogue and negotiations. Peace achieved through these means is our best guarantee to avoid resorting to war again.

The use of civilians as weapons of war represents the worst of human behaviour. The international community should show itself at its best by conquering evil with good, by beating our swords into ploughshares and our spears into pruning hooks, by combatting indifference with solidarity and by rising above narrow national and geopolitical interests to spare us all from the scourge of wars.

Mr. Jinga (Romania) (*spoke in French*): Romania associates itself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union. I would like to make some remarks in my national capacity.

Allow me to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, an issue that is central to the Security Council's responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Protecting the civilian population in armed conflicts is today a major challenge. The two emergency meetings of the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria last week demonstrate this.

We find the reports of the Secretary-General of June (S/2015/453) and September 2015 (S/2015/682) very helpful to our debate. The latter is based on the relevant observations and recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations. I also thank Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross for the very pertinent, albeit grim, briefings they presented today.

As this is the first time that the Security Council is discussing this subject after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1), I would like to express the satisfaction of Romania, as an active promoter of the Agenda, at the inclusion of Goal 16, on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. That Goal has an important impact on the sectoral aspects of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The many ongoing conflicts force us to stress once again that the responsibility for protecting civilians in times of war lies with the States, and that it is up to States to prosecute those who commit violations of international norms, including those of international humanitarian law. That obligation applies equally to all parties to conflict. We categorically condemn any attack against civilians and call on all Governments and warring factions to protect their populations and to encourage the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

In situations where States have neither the will or the ability to exercise their responsibilities, the international community must immediately become involved. It is the Security Council's duty to call on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to enforce the protection of civilians. Romania believes that the fight against impunity is a fundamental instrument for the protection of civilians. That is why we call on all States that have not yet done so to ratify the Rome Statute and cooperate with the ICC. It is also a sine qua non condition to preventing genocide and atrocities.

Romania has been participating in peacekeeping missions since 1991, and Romanian military and police forces have never been involved in events related to a lack of respect for the local civilian population. That is because we maintain a zero-tolerance policy for any abuse. In 2015, we participated in 10 out of 18 peacekeeping missions under the United Nations

flag, as well as in four missions of the Department of Safety and Security. We intend to make further contributions this year. Our men and women who go on mission under the United Nations flag, and under the flags of the European Union and NATO, receive strict instructions during the three months before their departure, including with regard to respect for civilians and human rights, with particular focus on the protection of women and children.

Romania has always maintained that the effective protection of civilians in armed conflicts is increased through the engagement of and cooperation with regional and subregional organizations. Just two months ago, we commemorated the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1631 (2005), the first resolution of the Security Council on cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations. As the author of that document, Romania is pleased to note in the Secretary-General's most recent report that we have made significant progress in that area in recent years.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Vale de Almeida: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Eveline Rooijmans, Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor at Oxfam, for their contributions to this debate.

The protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict remains an acute concern, and we appreciate that Uruguay has chosen this important topic for an open debate in the Security Council. The European Union and its member States share the outrage expressed by the Council in November 2015 that civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in today's conflicts (see S/PRST/2015/23). We also concur with the Secretary-General's view, as expressed in his report of July 2015, entitled "A vital and enduring commitment: implementing the responsibility to protect" (S/2015/500), that the prevailing disrespect for international humanitarian law on the part of some States and non-State armed groups, and the pervasive impunity that they enjoy for violations have become one of the most critical challenges for the protection of civilians.

The EU and its member States are committed to promoting the implementation of international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law worldwide. The respect for those laws is crucial to ensuring the protection of civilians in armed conflicts and to providing assistance to victims in the most effective manner. The frequent failure of the parties to armed conflicts to comply with their obligations is of profound concern. We are also concerned about the increased targeting of medical missions and personnel, again in clear violation of those obligations. We regret that no agreement could be found on a resolution to establish a new forum to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law at the thirty-second International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in Geneva in December 2015. However, participants agreed on the imperative need to improve compliance with international humanitarian law and committed to working towards that goal over the coming years. We encourage all States to participate in ongoing discussions on exactly how such a new forum might work.

The EU is implementing its guidelines on promoting compliance with international humanitarian law and is making full use of all of the tools at its disposal. The EU and its member States are committed to continuing their efforts to promote dissemination of and training in international humanitarian law inside the European Union, as well as to continue their efforts to advocate strongly and consistently for the respect of international law, including international humanitarian law.

The specific protection needs of women and children require special attention. Similar attention should also be paid to the phenomenon of sexual violence and the use of rape as a tactic of warfare, affecting women, children and also men. Children are disproportionately affected by armed conflicts, and grave violations against children continue to increase. The situation of children in Syria is of utmost concern.

National authorities have the primary responsibility to ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights. However, where national authorities are unable

or unwilling to take the necessary steps to ensure accountability, other mechanisms must be used to ensure that accountability. The International Criminal Court (ICC) should exercise jurisdiction, where applicable. The Security Council has an important role to play in that regard, given its global mandate to make referrals to the Court. The EU is a firm supporter of the ICC and its work. However, every case that is brought before the ICC represents, at the same time, a failure on the part of national Governments and the international community to prevent conflicts and atrocity crimes. Given the magnitude of sexual and gender-based crimes in times of conflict, the EU appreciates the special attention accorded by the Prosecutor of the ICC to such crimes.

For a number of years already, the mandates of many United Nations peacekeeping and other missions have included the protection of civilians. It remains a crucial dimension that is often decisive for the success and legitimacy of an operation. The EU welcomes the centrality of the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping, as put forward in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446) and the reports of the Secretary-General. The emphasis on the role of political processes, conflict prevention, early warning and partnerships in those reports is also key for efforts to advance the protection of civilians.

However, many challenges remain in terms of the effective implementation of protection mandates, and we need to continue to address them. For example, effective implementation requires better planning support for missions, applying lessons learned effectively and improving the understanding of how to support host States in their efforts to protect civilians. Operations need to be equipped with the necessary tools to address both the root causes of crises and their most visible consequences. Peacekeepers must protect civilians under threat of physical violence, in a manner consistent with the requirements of their mandates. Different levels of threat must be met with the appropriate and commensurate use of force, as necessary.

In many ways, training is the cornerstone of improving the protection of civilians by missions. Such training should also include predeployment and in-mission training on child protection, as well as on sexual exploitation and abuse. The EU is supportive of the United Nations zero-tolerance policy in that regard. Nothing is more damning to the legitimacy of international peacekeeping and efforts to regain the trust of local populations than peacekeepers abusing those whom they are mandated to protect. For its part, the EU has provided training on the protection of civilians, atrocity prevention, gender and child protection, human rights law and international humanitarian law as an integral part of the training curricula for its missions in Somalia, Mali and the Niger.

United Nations peace operations should also play a critical role in assisting the host States in the implementation of the responsibility to protect, as those operations are often in the frontline when a State is unable or unwilling to protect civilians from the risk of atrocity crimes. In that context, United Nations peace operations need to be staffed and equipped in a way that allows United Nations personnel to better interact with the local population and civil society organizations, including women's rights-oriented groups, with the overarching aim of responding to warning signals and reducing the risk of atrocity crimes. The implementation of the Human Rights Up Front initiative should make a positive contribution in that regard.

In cases where international efforts fail and atrocity crimes are committed, accountability is crucial. Where mandated or when the host State has consented thereto, United Nations peace operations should be equipped and staffed with the capability and expertise to assist in transparent investigations and support the collection of evidence in a professional manner. The EU is committed to assisting States to strengthen their national judicial and correctional systems, so as to enable them to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of atrocity crimes. Furthermore, closer cooperation between the ICC and missions in the field is of vital importance. When a peace operation is to be deployed in an ICC-situation country, its mandate should authorize it to facilitate or assist the ICC, including by assisting authorities in the protection of witnesses and the arrest and surrender of individuals subject to arrest warrants issued by the Court.

To conclude, the EU remains a loyal United Nations partner. The Security Council can count on our support in reinforcing the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including through support to United Nations peace operations and through our own missions. We will maintain our support for the promotion of compliance with international humanitarian law and strengthened accountability for serious violations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Poland.

Mr. Winid (Poland): I thank Uruguay for convening today's important debate. Poland aligns itself with the statement just delivered by observer of the the European Union, but I would like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

First, the issue of protection of civilians is now more important than ever. We still see millions of civilians suffering as a result of deadly military attacks, civilians sheltering in United Nations bases and recurring attacks on humanitarian workers. The Security Council has a fundamental role to play in this regard, given its primary responsibility for international peace and security.

Poland welcomes the fact that the protection of civilians is addressed in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446) and the subsequent report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Panel's recommendations (S/2015/682). With nine United Nations peacekeeping operations currently operating under explicit civilian protection mandates, we encourage the Secretariat to work further on the development of relevant policies, guidance and training.

The Secretary-General's report before us (S/2015/453) accurately indicates key challenges with regard to the protection of civilians, namely, limited humanitarian access, attacks on humanitarian and health-care workers and facilities, and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We agree that the development of policy standards to curb or limit the use of explosive weapons in populated areas could strengthen the protection of civilians.

Secondly, peacekeeping operations should be equipped with more advanced tools to address both the root causes of crises and their most visible consequences. There is a crucial need to improve early warning and rapid-reaction capacities. It is our duty to explore new capabilities and adopt new technologies. We also need to further work on developing a clearer understanding of the meaning of the kind of protection of civilians that is needed in peacekeeping operations. The universal value of human life should be cherished beyond any doubt. While caring about the lives of those who should be protected, we cannot forget about those who are given the task to protect. The challenges that peacekeepers face are often not sufficiently appreciated. They protect civilians in very harsh and difficult conditions, with often insufficient resources.

Thirdly, United Nations peace operations should play a critical role in assisting host States in the implementation of the responsibility to protect. The implementation of the Human Rights Up Front initiative should make a positive contribution in this regard. Human rights monitoring and advocacy, the development of the rule of law, strengthening the standards of good governance and political engagement should be central to United Nations protection efforts.

We should never forget about the most vulnerable, women and children, who require our undivided attention. The number of those most affected by armed conflicts is, unfortunately, not decreasing. We underline that national authorities remain primarily responsible for protecting their citizens.

Last but not least, let me stress that Poland remains committed to promoting the implementation of international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law worldwide. Respect for these laws is essential to helping the victims. However, the politicization of aid and the polarization of States around humanitarian issues remain a huge challenge. In that regard, we are grateful to the Secretary General for convening the World Humanitarian Summit and to the Government of Turkey, which will host that meeting in Istanbul in May. The Summit will be a rare opportunity to bring all stakeholders together and reshape the global humanitarian system for the years to come. It has been almost 25 years since the last time the world came together to discuss humanitarian aid.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Anshor (Indonesia): My delegation wishes to thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate on a highly important subject, and we congratulate you on Uruguay's accession to the Council presidency for the month of January.

My delegation also wishes to express its appreciation to the Deputy Secretary-General and the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Oxfam for their respective briefings.

This debate is timely in light of the fact that civilians now constitute the vast majority of victims in today's armed conflicts and of the continued trend of violations of international humanitarian law at an

alarming level in current conflict zones. In that regard, my delegation very much welcomes the fact that the Council is continuing its efforts to ensure that this critical issue remains at the very top of its agenda. My delegation hopes that today's debate will send a strong and clear message to all parties to conflicts on the imperative of respecting international humanitarian law without preconditions.

My delegation is of the views that the assessments and recommendations contained in the latest Secretary-General's report on this topic (S/2015/453), issued in June 2015, remain relevant. In particular, my delegation supports the idea of strengthening the monitoring, tracking and recording of civilian casualties. My delegation believes that a common system should be developed within the United Nations to systematically record civilian casualties in the framework of monitoring and reporting on violations of international humanitarian law, in cooperation with Member States and relevant civil society organizations. These mechanisms could be instrumental in informing the international community of the level of observance of international humanitarian law by any party to armed conflict, State and non-State actors alike, as the basis for improving strategies and policies in this regard, including by ensuring accountability of those responsible. This would also serve as a means of informing military strategy to reduce civilian casualties in armed conflicts.

In the same vein, my delegation also supports the intention of the Secretary-General to submit a report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict on an annual basis rather than every 18 months, as is the current practice. Indeed, protection of civilian issues in situations of concern, including the state of respect for international humanitarian law across current conflicts, require the international community's sustained attention and action.

In light of the broader context of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, my delegation wishes to stress that it is vital to ensure humanitarian access and the protection of humanitarian personnel in conflict zones. My delegation believes that the Council should play a more effective role in ensuring that all parties to armed conflict, including non-State actors, do their utmost to respect international humanitarian law, ensuring humanitarian access and guaranteeing the security and safety of persons and facilities protected under international humanitarian law. The Council should provide active and consistent political and operational support in this regard.

Regarding the protection of civilians in the framework of United Nations peacekeeping operations, my delegation believes that a common doctrine on protection of civilians and practical guidelines are important to the implementation of civilian protection mandates. Missions should have clear, credible and achievable mandates with an explicitly identified protocol on the use of force. My delegation also agrees with one of the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Peace Operations that missions also need to identify their limits. Along with closing the gap between what is asked of and what is provided to peacekeepers, my delegation underlines the impartiality of the Blue Helmets and the importance of seeing to their safety and security. These aspects are also essential to their success in meeting their tasks.

United Nations peacekeeping operations should be carried out in the broader context of conflict resolution and conflict prevention. Credible political solutions to conflict are the best and most lasting framework for civilian protection. This perspective includes addressing the root causes of conflict. It is therefore important to give proper attention to the building of national capacities in the fields of human rights, rule of law and justice as a part of a country's inclusive development and conflict-prevention frameworks.

Finally, my delegation shares the view that the forthcoming World Humanitarian Summit will provide an excellent opportunity to address this issue in a more in-depth and comprehensive manner.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Mr. Logar (Slovenia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Human Security Network, a cross-regional network composed of several States, including Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Panama, Switzerland, Thailand, South Africa as an observer State, and my own country, Slovenia.

For the sake of time, I will deliver a shorter of my statement. A full version will be available on our website.

I would like to start by thanking the delegation of Uruguay for convening today's open debate. I would also like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, the

Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the representative of Oxfam for their briefings.

Civilians continue to account for the majority of casualties in armed conflicts. The regular discussion of this topic is of the utmost importance to the work of the Security Council to better ensure the security and dignity of civilians affected by armed conflicts. The humanitarian situation affecting the people in the Syrian Arab Republic, South Sudan and Yemen, to mention a few, needs an urgent response.

Ensuring the respect of all parties to a conflict, including armed groups, for human rights law and international humanitarian law is the first necessary step in enhancing the protection of civilians. States must comply with their obligation to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded access of humanitarian relief for civilians in need and freedom of movement of humanitarian personnel. In the longer run, the political settlement of armed conflicts, coupled with preventive measures to ensure that there is no relapse into conflict, is needed to achieve more sustainable answers to the urgent challenge of the protection of civilians. The Human Security Network recognizes the efforts taken under the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative to strengthen the role of the entire United Nations system to better prevent and respond to large-scale violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in a timely and effective manner.

We continue to witness the grave abuses and violence, including sexual violence, being perpetrated against civilians, especially women and girls, in conflict and post-conflict settings. We unequivocally condemn sexual and gender-based violence and are determined to prevent and address those heinous crimes. At the same time, we recognize that women are not merely victims of armed conflicts but are positive agents of change. Accordingly, resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, the global study on its implementation, resolution 2242 (XXXX) and other related resolutions should be taken into account when addressing the issue of the protection of civilians.

Armed conflicts have a devastating effect on the lives of children. We categorically condemn all forms of violence against children. The international community must do more to protect children's rights during and after armed conflicts and guarantee that they have a safe and secure childhood. We also call for greater efforts to raise awareness of the plight of refugee and internally displaced children and their human rights.

Accountability is another key element in the protection of civilians. States must comply with their obligations under international law and hold accountable perpetrators of crimes committed against civilians. The Human Security Network stresses the usefulness of commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions in investigating and substantiating alleged violations of international law. When States are unwilling or unable to bring perpetrators to justice, a referral to the International Criminal Court is a complementary means to avoid impunity and restore dignity to survivors of atrocities, their families and communities.

The Security Council has mandated several peacekeeping missions to protect civilians. The Human Security Network underlines the importance of clear and achievable mandates with sufficient resources and capabilities to fulfil the protection mandate. The Human Security Network supports the recommendation of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations that all peacekeepers deployed are properly trained, equipped and commanded so as to be able to deliver on their responsibilities to protect civilians. The Human Security Network considers it to be of utmost importance that the Security Council remains seized of the question of the protection of civilians in armed conflicts and calls to continue this discussion on a regular basis.

I would now like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity. I would also like to say that Slovenia aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union a few minutes ago.

Civilians continue to account for the majority of casualties in conflicts and are too often deliberate targets by parties to conflict. The tragedy of Madaya is a stark reminder that civilians are not only affected by bullets and bombs, but also by other conflict-induced suffering. Safeguarding humanitarian access and respect for humanitarian principles needs to remain at the core of our endeavours. The impunity for violations of international humanitarian law can no longer be tolerated. Parties to conflict have to respect their obligations to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access.

The World Humanitarian Summit later this year will be a historic opportunity to build a truly global partnership among all actors within and beyond the

existing humanitarian system so as to prevent and end human suffering and address the root causes of crises.

In the past few years, situation-specific resolutions adopted by the Security Council have increasingly called for protection to be made a priority in the implementation of peacekeeping mandates. Currently, 10 out of 16 United Nations peace operations have the protection of civilians at the core of their mandates. As these operations play a central role in protecting civilians, it is essential that the Council consider providing all peacekeeping missions with such mandates, with special emphasis given to the protection of the most vulnerable, such as children, the elderly and the disabled.

Women are important players in the protection of civilians. Their equal and full participation is of vital importance in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution, peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. Their involvement is crucial if we are to find the best solutions for lessening the burden of civilians in conflict situations.

To mitigate the harm on civilians, special attention must also be given to prevent and address sexual violence in conflict and the role of peace operations in this regard. United Nations peacekeepers should be role models in preventing and addressing sexual violence and abuse — and should not be the perpetrators of sexual abuse — and should respect the United Nations zero-tolerance policy for all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse.

In conclusion, I would stress that the continuous support and engagement of the Council is crucial for the protection of civilians on the ground.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mminele (South Africa): Mr. President, South Africa wishes to congratulate you and the delegation of Uruguay on assuming the presidency of the Security Council. We also thank you for organizing this timely debate, which is of continuing relevance.

States bear the primary responsibility to protect their citizens, in accordance with their legal obligations under international law. However, the international community today is increasingly being challenged by the changing nature of conflicts, which have become asymmetrical and are motivated by the goal of targeting the civilian population, which is the most vulnerable in times of armed conflict.

This debate is useful in evaluating our reaction to these circumstances and ascertaining whether the available tools in our arsenal are effective in responding to our collective responsibility. It is therefore critical that in responding to and countering this extreme violence, we ensure that we ourselves are not the perpetrators of acts that bring suffering and death to the very civilians whom we are trying to protect.

In adding our voice to today's timely debate, my delegation wishes to make the following three points.

First, the protection of civilians could best be achieved by the Security Council strengthening and investing greater efforts in prevention and finding political solutions to conflicts. Palestine, Libya and Syria are glaring examples of the untold suffering that civilians experience as a consequence of the Council's inability to find political solutions to these conflicts. The selective application and abuse of protection-of-civilians mandates undermine the credibility of the international community in pursuing this goal. Furthermore, opting for a military solution, including by arming members of the opposition, blurs the distinction between civilian and combatant and subsequently makes the pacific settlement of disputes a less attractive alternative.

Secondly, we wish to underline that while it remains the primary responsibility of States to protect civilians within their borders, armed opposition groups must also bear responsibility for ensuring that unarmed civilians are protected. The Council should ensure that failure by both State and non-State actors to uphold that principle does not go unpunished. Ensuring accountability for the most serious crimes, in particular those of international concern, is a very important aspect of ensuring the credibility of the protection of civilians and is key to delivering global justice. Strengthening accountability is therefore an essential element in enhancing compliance by the parties to armed conflict with their international obligations.

Last but not least, South Africa holds the view that peacekeepers should be deployed in support of political or peace processes. However, should political or peace processes be obstructed and non-military protection tools be inadequate, peacekeeping missions with an explicit mandate to protect civilians must play their part in the protection of civilians, including through the

use of force. The deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a credible example of the success that can be achieved through the use of force against those who obstruct the peace.

As highlighted in the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446), the three principles of United Nations peacekeeping should not be an excuse for failure to protect civilians or defend the missions proactively, and there should be flexibility in interpreting these principles to ensure that peacekeepers enforce their mandate. This would, however, require that peacekeeping missions be adequately resourced and provided with the requisite mandate and capabilities to implement their mandate. Additionally, the United Nations, through the use of Chapter VIII, could rely on the comparative advantage of regional arrangements in advancing the protection of civilians in conflict situations, as demonstrated in Somalia and Darfur.

In conclusion, preventative measures, the promotion and protection of human rights and support for development within a stable environment ultimately forms the best long-term strategy for the protection and, indeed, prosperity of civilians under the responsibility of States.

It is my delegation's hope that this thematic discussion will result in concrete actions, particularly by the Council, which is entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to begin by congratulating you once again, Mr. President, on your country's election as a member of the Security Council and on its accession to the presidency of the Council for this month. I should like also to congratulate the other new members of the Council, and I thank you for having convened this important meeting.

The creation of the United Nations gave hope to peoples around the world that the Organization would discharge its responsibilities, namely, the maintenance of international peace and security and protecting humanity from the sufferings of war. But the Organization has not been able to fulfil the hopes of the founding fathers; it has not been able to put an end to war or to the resultant human suffering, despite the fact that more than 16 years have elapsed since a debate began within the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Experience has shown that protecting civilians in armed conflict is always a selective process and subject to double standards, which contravenes the very basis of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The impact on peoples of such interventions is very clear. Regrets or recognition of errors made in the process of attempting to ease the suffering of peoples are not enough to restore hope or to rebuild the States affected.

My country would like to underscore the following several points.

First, good offices used to prevent crises or settle disputes peacefully, in keeping with the Charter of the United Nations and the norms of international law, are the best means of protecting civilians.

Secondly, the main responsibility for protecting civilians against all dangers, including terrorist acts, rest on the shoulders of the State. The State is the authority that is responsible for maintaining peace and stability throughout its territory.

Thirdly, the protection of civilians in armed conflict cannot become reality unless the norms of international law and the Charter of the United Nations are fully respected, including, first and foremost, sovereignty, sovereign equality and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other States.

Fourthly, it is unacceptable to address the issue of the protection of civilians in a selective manner, which makes it into a means of furthering the political agendas and interests of certain influential States at the expense of other Member States. Some Members, including Security Council members, use the protection of civilians as a pretext to impose their interests, which undermines both the Council and the Charter.

Fifthly, the issue of the protection of civilians should be approached comprehensively by addressing anything that might be harmful to civilians and preventing unilateral interventions that the United Nations recognizes as illegal. Civilians should not be exposed to suffering or slow death caused by the deprivation of daily means of subsistence. They should not be forced into displacement, asylum or any situation

in which they could be subject to blackmail. The protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict requires Member States also to respect the Security Council resolutions pertaining to the fight against and financing of terrorism.

My delegation renews its plea for the protection of civilians suffering under the Israeli occupation of the occupied Syrian Arab Golan and the other occupied Arab territories, and for an end to the aggressive practices of Israel, the occupying Power, as well as to its occupation. The Council's silence vis-à-vis Israel's violations of international law, international humanitarian law, human rights and other international instruments pertaining to the combat against terrorism allows Israel to believe that it is immune from accountability and that it can support terrorist groups in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan and other regions, which threatens both regional and international peace and security, and undermines the rules and regulations of international law.

In conclusion, unfortunately some delegations are using this meeting to repeat their allegations with regard to the situation in our country and to prevent any positive action intended to resolve the crisis in Syria, including the upcoming talks in Geneva. It is also unfortunate that a large number of speakers have not addressed the issue of the root causes of the Syrian crisis, including terrorist groups supported by some States, in particular Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar; the perpetration of the Israeli occupation of Syrian territory; and the unilateral measures imposed on our country. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic once again asks the Security Council to assume it responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations in order to put an end to the Israeli occupation. We further request that Israeli authorities be held accountable for their violations of Security Council resolutions.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): At the outset, allow me to congratulate Uruguay, a new member of the Security Council, and to wish every success success during its important mandate.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered by observer of the European Union. I would like to make additional remarks in my national capacity.

We thank the Uruguayan presidency for holding this timely debate on the protection of civilians. This is a topic that requires our constant and undivided attention, especially when we are witnessing unprecedented levels of human suffering throughout the world. I would also like to thank and commend the Secretary-General for his report on this topic (S/2015/453).

Day after day we see media reports and images of civilians in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, South Sudan and many other conflict areas bearing the brunt of conflict, fleeing war zones, struggling to survive in unbearable circumstances. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance is staggering. In that context, we are hopeful that the World Humanitarian Summit will be a significant step towards finding sustainable solutions to the global humanitarian crisis.

The conflicts are many and often protracted, and it may seem that too often we address them with a business-as-usual approach. But no conflict and no human suffering should be treated in such a way. The situation in the Syrian city of Madaya, with the images of people there starving to death, is just one among many tragedies about which we cannot stay silent. Let me therefore add Croatia's strong voice to the calls of the international community on all Syrian parties, especially the regime, to end all sieges, allow immediate and unfettered humanitarian access, and adhere to international humanitarian law. Protecting civilians and ending the widespread atrocities and suffering in Syria must be the focus of the efforts of the international community all the time.

Unfortunately, the pictures coming out of Madaya and other Syrian cities remind us of what many people in our part of the world went through a quarter of a century ago. February will mark the twentieth anniversary of the official end of the siege of Sarajevo, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which lasted for almost four years — the longest city siege of the twentieth century. This year, Croatia will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the siege of Vukovar, a town that was besieged and shelled constantly for almost three months by Serbian forces. It is important to underline that at least some of those responsible for the atrocities committed in Vukovar and Sarajevo are facing justice before the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

Accountability and bringing those responsible to face justice should be regarded as part of the equation of protecting civilians. The parties to a conflict have to

ensure full compliance with international humanitarian law. Clearly, sieges, starvation and the denial of aid are unlawful; they are crimes punishable under international law. We therefore reiterate the importance of the International Criminal Court in the context of protecting civilians in armed conflicts. Those violating human rights in armed conflicts should know that they will face justice for the crimes committed. That is why Croatia supports the request for the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

We acknowledge that the primary responsibility to protect civilians lies with the State, but the international community has to assume its share of the responsibility to protect, and take collective action through the Security Council if and when national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations.

We are also very concerned by reports of the alleged use of cluster munitions in Yemen, Syria and other conflict areas. In September last year, Croatia hosted the first Review Conference of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. We strongly support the overall goal of the Convention, which in our view has been largely successful in stigmatizing cluster munitions, which should never be used by anyone at any time. We also welcome the humanitarian aspects of the Convention, which has established high standards for assistance to cluster munitions victims, their socioeconomic reintegration, and the enhancement of local and regional capacities. Croatia was one of the sponsors of General Assembly resolution 63/71, the first-ever on this subject.

Croatia is also deeply concerned about the implications of armed conflict on women and children, especially the fact that sexual violence against women continues to be used as a tactic of conflict. Sexual violence is not only one of the most heinous crimes committed against women in conflict, but is also one that is often the least visible. Therefore, Croatia believes that we have to continue to raise our voice against sexual violence and that the international community can and must do more to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict. For us, it is also of utmost importance that rape and other forms of sexual violence in conflicts be recognized as war crimes and crimes against humanity, for which the International Criminal Court is also competent.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that the prevention of conflicts must lie at the core of all our efforts to ensure the protection of civilians. We therefore welcome the fact that the peacekeeping and peacebuilding reviews put prevention at the centre of international peace and security. We would also like to reiterate our strong support for the Human Rights Up Front initiative and the concept of the responsibility to protect.

Siniša Glavašević, a radio reporter who perished with so many of his fellow citizens in Vukovar in 1991, and whose stories and reports from that besieged Croatian town bear witness to the tragedies of life under siege, in one of his stories, said that war was truly the most terrible and destructive thing to happen to humankind. I believe that that sentence perfectly summarizes the reasons that we should all strive to be better at preventing conflicts, and if conflicts do happen, at protecting civilians because, in the end, it is they who pay the highest price.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Chile.

Mr. Barros Melet (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Uruguayan presidency for having convened today's debate and for having prepared the concept note (S/2016/22, annex). We also thank the Deputy Secretary General, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor of Oxfam for their briefings.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the Permanent Representative of Slovenia on behalf of the Human Security Network and by the Permanent Representative of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Civilians continue to be affected most by armed conflict. Their protection is one of the issues that the Security Council must continue to prioritize, particularly in its decisions related to actions taken by the players in a conflict. The responsibility to protect civilians because a State is unable or unwilling to take action to ensure respect for human rights and international humanitarian law is a key element in the response from the Organization and Council. The code of conduct on the non-use of the veto in situations of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, prepared by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, of which my country is a member, and the French-Mexican statement on the issue, which we have endorsed, are concrete proposals in the right direction.

The reports of the ongoing review processes contain similar recommendations. We acknowledge the need to strengthen early-warning mechanisms and the role that regional and subregional organizations play in the effort. The political and humanitarian signals that the Security Council sends should reaffirm the importance of human rights, first and foremost, and assess information provided by missions themselves and by civil society.

Enhanced coordination among the Council, troop- and police-contributing countries and the Secretariat would help to better protect civilians. Troops should be properly trained and missions should include gender advisers and advisers on protecting women, children and human rights as an independent category to ensure that vulnerable people are protected and that their special needs are met. We acknowledge the particular challenges that women and girls face. The implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and other relevant resolutions, as well as the recommendations of the global study thereon will undoubtedly help to protect them. We urge the Council to implement resolutions 2122 (2013) and 2242 (2015) by convening the informal group of experts on women and peace and security to better attend to the task.

Similarly, the situation of children and armed conflict deserves special attention. We call for the implementation of resolution 2143 (2014) and other relevant resolutions to ensure the protection and non-military use of schools and universities during conflicts, according to the Lucens Guidelines and the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration. There exists a responsibility to combat impunity and prosecute and punish those responsible for crimes perpetrated against civilians. If States are unable or unwilling to prosecute alleged perpetrators, it will fall to the International Criminal Court to deal with such crimes, under the Rome Statute.

In conclusion, we hope that today's debate will lead to greater political support for protecting civilians according to the provisions of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Latvia.

Mr. Mažeiks (Latvia): I thank you, Mr. President, for having organized today's debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I also thank the Deputy Secretary-General, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor of Oxfam for their briefings.

Latvia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Today, far too many conflicts around the globe have a devastating impact on civilians. Innocent civilians, including women and children, often constitute the vast majority of victims or they are deliberately targeted. Lately, almost every single day we hear about the most terrible crimes such as killings, torture, sexual violence, kidnapping, slavery and other crimes perpetrated by parties to the armed conflict or violent extremists in many regions. The increasing role of illegal armed groups and terrorist organizations in conflicts creates an even more challenging environment for civilians in conflict zones. Conflicts and violence force people to leave their homes, leading to the highest number of displaced persons and refugees since the Second World War. A generous international response to the growing humanitarian needs of people in dire and complex crises is required on a daily basis.

A failure to protect civilians is tantamount to disrespect for international law — humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights law. While at the normative level there has been progress — the relevant Security Council resolutions play an important role — the lack of respect for international humanitarian law and the existence of impunity on the ground are increasing.

States bear the primary responsibility to protect their populations from atrocity crimes. Therefore, Latvia fully supports the joint appeal of the Secretary-General and the President of the ICRC of 31 October 2015 to make every effort to achieve political solutions to conflicts, to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law, hold perpetrators of violations accountable, grant unhindered access to and protect humanitarian and medical personnel and facilities, and respond to the needs of internally displaced persons and refugees. Latvia is a strong supporter of the principle of the responsibility to protect. We look forward to reaffirming that commitment via a General Assembly resolution.

Latvia believes that promoting the protection of civilians in all United Nations activities is essential. The Security Council must view the matter as a priority when addressing situations of concern. Its failure to act promptly in order to prevent or stop a conflict, and to

demand accountability, is a severe blow to the victims. We call on the permanent members of the Security Council to refrain from using the veto in situations of atrocity crimes and, in that regard, we strongly support the initiatives of France and Mexico, and the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group.

Strengthening conflict prevention and the reading of early warning signs are key. We applaud the Secretary-General for promoting his Human Rights Up Front initiative, which has been created to regard human rights and the protection of civilians as a system-wide responsibility of the Organization. Latvia believes that all three United Nations reviews — on women and peace and security, on peace operations and on the peacebuilding architecture — will contribute to a strengthened United Nations response to conflicts. We are especially encouraged that the reviews recognize the role of women in all areas of achieving peace and security.

Latvia welcomes the fact that protecting civilians in conflict has come to the forefront of many peace operations. However, the effective implementation of protection mandates remains a challenge and must be improved through the ongoing peacekeeping review. Latvia is willing to contribute to United Nations peacekeeping efforts and, in addition to our engagement in the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and NATO missions, has decided to join a United Nations peacekeeping mission for the first time. Last week, the Parliament of Latvia supported the participation of Latvian troops in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, but we will also increase our practical engagement in the global coalition to counter the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, also known as Daesh, and will contribute to the training of Iraqi security forces.

We cannot become immune to human suffering and calls for help. Remaining, as well as emerging, challenges to the protection of civilians in conflicts from Syria to Ukraine, as underscored by the recent report of the Secretary-General, must be addressed with a sense of urgency. The international community must step up its commitment to providing stronger protection to civilians.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Oh Joon (Republic of Korea): I would first like to congratulate you, Sir, and the delegation of Uruguay for assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month, which is the first month of your term in the Council. Let me also thank you for convening today's timely debate on the protection of civilians.

As we enter the new year, we are humbled by the daunting realities around the world, given the devastating impact on civilians — particularly women and children — resulting from the many conflicts that we are grappling with. In the past, the Security Council has repeatedly expressed the urgent need to protect civilians in armed conflicts. Resolutions 2222 (2015), on the protection of journalists, 2175 (2014), on humanitarian operations, and 2150 (2014), which calls for the prevention of, and the fight against, genocide are only a few recent examples. Back in February 2013, during my country's presidency of the Council, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2013/2) that comprehensively addressed the issue of the protection of civilians — including humanitarian access — and refugees, the need to protect humanitarian personnel, sexual- and gender-based violence, and the need to end impunity for serious violations. We urge the Security Council to continue to address those issues with a renewed sense of urgency and resolve.

In that regard, we appreciate the Secretary-General's continued commitment to incorporating the protection of civilians throughout all United Nations peace operations. A large part of his September 2015 report (S/2015/453) is devoted to identifying ways in which to better implement the protection-of-civilians mandate in the field, inter alia by tailoring them to the conditions on the ground. My delegation also welcomes the Security Council's presidential statement of 25 November 2015 (S/PRST/2015/23). For our part, the Government of the Republic of Korea has been engaged in the ongoing discussion to build and sustain the political momentum for the implementation of the recommendations of the Secretary-General and of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations. Last year, we hosted two conferences on that subject, first in New York in May, followed by one in Seoul in October. We look forward to continuing that discussion this year.

The Republic of Korea also supports the fight against impunity and for holding accountable those who have committed the most serious crimes of

international concern. We have joined many other delegations in supporting the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, as well as the French-Mexican initiative on the suspension of the veto power in cases of mass atrocities.

Finally, I wish to underscore that Member States bear the primary responsibility to protect civilians. It is our responsibility to bring perpetrators of atrocity crimes to justice, as specified in the relevant international instruments. With that in mind, my delegation wishes to urge the members of the Security Council to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document and to reaffirm especially its paragraphs 138 and 139, regarding the responsibility to protect. The Security Council already has a wide range of tools to enhance compliance and accountability so as to address the current challenges presented by the protection of civilians. The task at hand is to mobilize the collective will of the Council to utilize those tools. We hope that the views expressed during today's debate will help the Council to carry out its commitment to protect civilians.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Georgia.

Mr. Imnadze (Georgia): At the outset, I also want to join the previous speakers in congratulating the Uruguayan presidency for its leadership and to thank it for organizing this debate. My appreciation also goes to all the briefers for their valuable contributions earlier today.

Georgia fully associates itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union. In my national capacity, I would like to make the following brief comments, while the full text will be made available.

More than 15 years have passed since the Security Council held its initial open debate on the issue before us (see S/PV.3980). Yet as we speak, millions of people worldwide are suffering from the dire consequences of armed conflict, which deprives them of their fundamental rights and freedoms, separates them from their families and forces them out of the places of their permanent residence. The task of protecting civilians in conflict remains challenging. From Syria to Iraq, Yemen and Libya, to the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, South Sudan, the Sudan, to Ukraine, civilians caught up in armed conflict are being killed and injured. The scale of brutality is often beyond the scope of our imagination. It is the collective responsibility of the United Nations, in particular of the Security Council, to undertake all the necessary measures to protect civilians and ensure their basic rights.

Another vital issue is the ability of the international community to address the human rights situation in areas where the official authorities cannot exercise their sovereign rights and which are under the effective military control of an occupying Power. In such situations, international human rights and humanitarian law should nevertheless operate without any impediment in order to provide a minimum level of protection for the civilian population. Safe and unhindered access for humanitarian actors to reach people in need of protection and assistance is another important element. It is imperative that populations residing in conflict-affected areas be provided with unhindered humanitarian aid and that, to that end, the relevant international organizations be allowed to carry out their activities.

The issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict is of particular concern to me as a representative of a country that has had to withstand a full-scale military aggression against its statehood and independence in the recent past. More than seven years after Russia's military invasion of my nation, 20 per cent of our sovereign territory remains under illegal military occupation, in blatant violation of Russia's own obligations under international law, including the 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement. The population currently residing in Georgia's occupied regions is deprived of basic human rights and minimal safeguards for their lives, not to mention their civil, socioeconomic and cultural rights. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Georgian internally displaced persons and refugees are doomed to protracted displacement.

Over the past several years, the occupation regime has been installing barbed wire fences along the occupation line to divide families and communities and to prevent people-to-people contacts. That is happening against the backdrop of continued militarization and the complete absence of any international monitoring mechanism inside the occupied regions — a situation that has in fact been reflected in General Assembly resolutions and reports of the Secretary-General and of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of internally

displaced persons. Notably, after having been repeatedly denied access to territories, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, referred to the occupied Georgian regions as "a black hole" and "one of the most inaccessible places on Earth, with no access permitted for international agencies."

A detailed account of what I have just mentioned can also be found in one of the quarterly reports on the human rights situations in the occupied territories of Georgia issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which are also issued as official documents of the General Assembly and the Security Council, for those who are interested.

The only international monitoring mechanism currently on the ground is the European Union Monitoring Mission, but even that mechanism has been prevented from fully implementing its mandate, as well as from entering the occupied territories. It is imperative that the conflict-affected population be provided with unhindered humanitarian aid and that the relevant international actors be allowed to carry out their activities according to their respective mandates.

There is no alternative to strengthening our common efforts to protect civilians in armed conflicts. We need to take concrete steps to alleviate the consequences of armed hostilities for civilians and to safeguard their rights and freedoms.

In conclusion, I reiterate that Georgia aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union and calls on all the relevant actors to ensure rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to the affected populations in unresolved conflicts worldwide. For our part, my country stands ready to contribute to concerted international efforts to ensure more effective protection for civilian populations during armed conflicts and in the post-conflict phase.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Grant (Canada) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, allow me, on behalf of the Government of Canada, to extend our deepest condolences to the families and friends of those persons killed in the recent attack in Ouagadougou, among them six Canadian humanitarian aid workers and volunteers. We wish a speedy recovery to all those who were injured.

Canada firmly condemns in the strongest terms all acts that threaten the safety of civilians, including those who strive to improve the lives of vulnerable people around the world. Working in challenging and dangerous situations, their efforts to establish lasting ties between peoples, while building a more just and peaceful world, will never cease. The attack I just mentioned is yet again another reminder of the danger that terrorism poses around the world for Canadians and for all our citizens throughout the world. It is reminder of the need to work with partners to deal with global threats.

(*spoke in English*)

I would like to thank Uruguay for its initiative to hold this open debate today and for allowing delegations broad scope to raise our concerns with regard to the protection of civilians. It is essential that the Security Council devote its attention to the mounting protection challenges. Canada would therefore also like to acknowledge and welcome the Council's recent presidential statement (S/PRST/2015/23), which will enable States to more regularly and comprehensively address those concerns.

Canada is deeply concerned by the scale on which civilian populations are suffering, and often targeted, in armed conflicts by State as well as non-State actors. The growing complexity of armed conflicts, marked by the fragmentation of armed groups, asymmetrical warfare and the regionalization of conflicts, demonstrates the need for sustained international attention to meet the protection needs of populations affected by violence and armed conflict. In too many places, men, women and children are victims of indiscriminate attacks, sexual violence, the denial of humanitarian assistance and other violations of international law. Warring parties today are exhibiting what the Secretary-General has rightly called a casual disregard for human life and dignity, and with it, unacceptable contempt for the rules of war.

It is Canada's view that the fundamental issue is not that there are legal or normative gaps, but rather that there is an alarming rate of failure to fully and properly implement international humanitarian law obligations. The full implementation of international humanitarian law is essential for the protection of civilians during times of armed conflict. It is therefore essential that the international community and the Council re-energize their efforts to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law, enable humanitarian access, promote

and protect human rights and, most important, prevent and resolve conflict.

(*spoke in French*)

We hope that the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit will allow us to call attention to protection issues. The Summit will provide an opportunity to examine key aspects of actions aimed at promoting the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, such as compliance with international humanitarian law, the fight against sexual violence, as well as access to safe and unhindered humanitarian aid. It will allow us to prepare the ground for better responses to humanitarian and protection needs, notably in confronting the current crisis of historic proportions provoked by the displacement of populations fleeing violence.

Finally, while national Governments bear the responsibility for protecting civilians, the United Nations and the Council also play an important role in that area, in addition to having the necessary tools to prevent conflicts and to respond to and resolve them. Humanitarian operations currently under way in Madaya and other besieged communities must be sustained and expanded, but they are just one example of what can be done. The recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations and promising initiatives such as the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians can guide us in strengthening our capacity to protect civilians in the field.

Moreover, we urge the Council, in its resolutions concerning conflict and the protection of civilians, to apply an approach that addresses the gender perspective. One of the best ways to protect women, men and children is to take into account the various impacts that conflicts have on each of those groups, as well as the different contributions they can make to the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

(*spoke in English*)

In conclusion, Canada emphasizes that we must summon the will to act in the face of the challenges before us. People must not lose hope. As daunting as the circumstances may be, we see encouraging signs that must be nurtured and opportunities that must be seized. We thank the Uruguayan presidency for this opportunity to express our concerns. We look forward to collaborating on renewed efforts to enhance the protection of civilians.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Kickert (Austria): First of all, I would like to thank Uruguay for convening this open debate. The protection of civilians in armed conflict has always been of great importance to Austria. We remain engaged in efforts to strengthen the safety and security of civilians by supporting and complementing the work of the United Nations, including through dedicated training courses in close cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

The prevention and peaceful solution of conflicts remains the most effective method for ensuring the safety and well-being of civilians and strengthening human security. In that context, women's participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution is crucial for achieving inclusive and sustainable peace. At the same time, we continue to witness the perpetration of the most heinous violations against women and children on a large scale, including sexual and gender-based violence. Austria therefore fully supports the efforts to enhance the effective implementation of the agenda on women and peace and security, including the recommendations contained in the October 2015 global study on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), entitled *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace*, and the agenda on children and armed conflict, which should be taken into account when addressing the protection of civilians.

We fully support the recommendations on the role of peace operations in the protection of civilians contained in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) (see S/2015/446), as well as the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the HIPPO recommendations (S/2015/682). Austria agrees that, if a peace operation is so mandated, the protection of civilians requires proactive operations, which may include the use of force by uniformed personnel. Moreover, it is important to make the protection of civilians a mission-wide task, which requires adequate training and resources, including early-warning and protection-of-civilians-related technological capabilities, as well as dedicated personnel. We welcome the inclusion of senior protection-of-civilian advisers in all missions with such a mandate and we encourage the Secretariat to expand their presence.

Despite efforts by the Council and the international community as a whole, armed conflicts still cause immense civilian suffering around the world, further aggravating the already dire humanitarian situation in Syria, Yemen and South Sudan, among other countries. To that end, it is of the utmost importance that we end the persisting climate of impunity and ensure accountability. We invite all members of the Security Council to sign the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, which includes a pledge to support timely and decisive Council action in situations involving atrocity crimes, as well as a pledge not to vote against Security Council resolutions aimed at preventing or ending those crimes. Furthermore, the crucial role of the ICC cannot be overstated, and we call on the Council to refer situations in which crimes under the Rome Statute may have been committed to the Court. We also call on all States to fulfil their obligation to fully cooperate with the ICC.

The full compliance of all parties with international humanitarian law remains of unquestionable relevance to the protection of civilians. In today's world, international humanitarian law is confronted with many serious challenges: its brutal disregard by certain non-State actors, the destruction of cultural heritage, and attacks against protected persons and institutions. The growing numbers of refugees that are currently leaving their war-torn home regions are a direct result of the constant violations of international humanitarian law. For many years, Austria has strongly supported efforts towards the better implementation of international humanitarian law and the creation of a special mechanism for that purpose, and was actively engaged in the process following the adoption of conference resolution 1 adopted at the 31st International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2011. Unfortunately, the negotiations at the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent did not lead to the desired result.

In 2015, 39 journalists were killed in the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa alone, most of them executed by the Islamic State, while a further 54 journalists were kidnapped. The high number demonstrates that armed groups in the region are ready to do whatever it takes to stifle criticism and independent information emerging from conflict zones. Impunity for such acts remains widespread and fuels further violations. We call on the United Nations to provide timely and accurate information on threats to journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in conflict situations, which is a prerequisite if the Council is to address the topic in a more coherent manner, including in country-specific deliberations.

Austria also highlights the concern about the use of explosive weapons in populated areas as a major cause of civilian harm in many countries. In most armed conflicts, civilian casualties from explosive weapons in populated areas dramatically outweigh military casualties. This is a grave humanitarian problem and a severe challenge for the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Let me close by assuring the Security Council that Austria will continue to work closely with all interested stakeholders to further strengthen the protection of civilians.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Galbavý (Slovakia): I thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate and for giving us the opportunity to speak. I would like to congratulate your country on joining the Security Council and wish you every success.

My delegation welcomed the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2015/22, of 25 November 2015, in which the Security Council underscored the importance of the protection of civilians as one of the core issues on its agenda. Swift action by the Security Council is necessary in situations posing threads to civilians.

I would also like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the representative of Oxfam for their respective briefings.

We are very concerned about the increasing gross violations of the international humanitarian law, especially by non-State actors, and attacks against humanitarian workers and health-care workers and facilities. Ongoing conflicts throughout the world have horrifying impact on civilian populations. According to Secretary-General's report (S/2015/453), displacement has reached its highest levels since the Second World War. There are more than 60 million refugees, including 38 million internally displaced persons, and the number is still growing. Civilians in besieged towns, such as Madaya, Kafraya and Fu'ah, are suffering from

malnutrition and lack of medical care, which is simply unacceptable.

My delegation fully aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the observer of the European Union. I wish to take this opportunity to highlight a few additional points.

First, the main responsibility for the protection of its population lies with States. My country supports the further advancement of the responsibility to protect principles, anchored in three pillars.

Secondly, as far as United Nations peacekeeping operations are concerned, many improvements have been made since 1999, when the first peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone was mandated to take the steps necessary to protect civilians. We commend the Secretariat for elaborating its policy for the implementation of protection of civilians mandates and encourage them to further identify ways to make this implementation more effective. We appreciate the commitment expressed by the Secretary-General in his respective reports to inform the Security Council about situations where escalating risks or shortfalls in the capability of missions to fulfill protection mandates endanger civilians. We also support his recommendation to submit reports on the protection of civilians every 12 months and to hold open debates of the Security Council in June and December.

Unfortunately, there are cases where those who should protect become perpetrators. My country, as a troop contributor, supports the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers.

Thirdly, the protection of civilians and security sector reform (SSR) are complementary and mutually reinforcing. They are both aimed at the protection of civilians and their communities from physical violence, and ultimately at improving human and State security in a society. We believe that it is important to better clarify how the protection of civilians and SSR are related in order to strengthen the reinforcing relationship and convergences between them in the decision-making process of the Security Council.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the need to end impunity and hold accountable those responsible for crimes against humanity. In situations where national authorities are unable or unwilling to conduct national investigations, the role of the International Criminal Court is indispensable. We therefore call on all United Nations Member States to ratify the Rome Statutes and its amendments and thereby achieve its universality.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Laassel (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): I would like first to congratulate you, Sir, on your country's accession to the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January, and to thank your delegation for organizing this open debate on an issue that concerns all of us — the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

I take this opportunity to thank the Deputy Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing, taking stock of the current state of the protection of civilians and highlighting the challenges facing the international community in this regard.

Finally, I thank the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the representative of Oxfam for their briefings and especially for all the efforts of the members of their organizations, often undertaken at the risk of their lives.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The ongoing attention and involvement of the Council, supported not only by the entire United Nations membership but also by non-governmental organizations and civil society, have led to significant normative progress the protection of civilians. As noted in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2015/453) on the issue, numerous resolutions and presidential statements, the updating of aides memoire and the establishment of mandates tailored to the needs of women and children in situations of armed conflict have promoted the creation of a robust legal framework. However, it is clear that despite these advances, the fate of civilian populations, especially women and children, continues to deteriorate, with an ongoing increase in the number of victims, displaced persons and refugees. The damning figures of the past decade have never been higher, at least since the Second World War, and forecasts for the coming decades are hardly promising. The past year was particularly marked by this scourge.

Morocco strongly condemns all indiscriminate attacks affecting civilian populations, and calls on parties to conflict to honour their obligations under international humanitarian law and international

human rights law. While the protection of civilians lies primarily with States, it is clear that in times of conflict, the capacity of these States may be inadequate or non-existent. In such cases, the international community has a responsibility to support these countries by building their capacity and providing the necessary means to shoulder their responsibilities for protecting populations on their soil. It is in this context that Morocco is redoubling its efforts to cooperate with countries in or emerging from conflict, including with respect to security sector reform and strengthening the rule of law.

We must also commit ourselves firmly to promoting the implementation of and compliance with the relevant provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, international law, especially human rights law, and the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols. It is unacceptable that hospitals and schools are targeted indiscriminately and that weapons are used indiscriminately in densely populated zones, hitting not only the combatants but also civilian populations. We believe that the fight against impunity should be at the centre of our debate. It is also unacceptable that journalists and humanitarian workers are deliberately targeted. International humanitarian law is too often swept aside, despite repeated appeals by the Security Council. Similarly, we reiterate the imperative of respecting the principles of the equality, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

Humanitarian assistance is an important element in the protection of civilians during armed conflict. Bringing humanitarian assistance to those who need it should remain a priority of the international community, because the lives of thousands of vulnerable people are at stake. With the unprecedented number of displaced persons fleeing conflict, the international community must redouble its efforts to bring the necessary assistance to those people. That is why my delegation believes that the World Humanitarian Summit, to be held in Istanbul in May 2016, will be a crucial meeting that will make it possible for the international community to rethink humanitarian assistance and find new ways and means to improve its response to crises and make humanitarian assistance more effective and efficient. Humanitarian assistance cannot be effective without free and unimpeded access for humanitarian organizations to people affected by conflict.

The seminar on the protection of civilians that was organized in November 2015 by the delegations of Uruguay and Australia made it possible for us to develop our thinking with a view to underscoring the importance of political solutions to conflict and to reconciling that with the imperative of the protection of civilians. Indeed, one of the main instruments available to the Security Council for ensuring the protection of civilians in armed conflict is peacekeeping operations, an area that is rightly currently being reviewed. Morocco fully subscribes to the recommendations of the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peacekeeping Operations (see S/2015/446), especially with regard to the chapters on troop-contributing countries. Moroccan troops, which have been deployed for over 60 years in peacekeeping operations, have always considered the protection of civilians to be a key part of their mission. That aspect is duly taken into account during the predeployment stages of training Moroccan contingents to serve under the United Nations flag. A specific example is the offensive undertaken around Bria, Central African Republic, which made it possible to restore State authority throughout the region, ensure the protection of civilians and even allow for the return of many displaced persons.

Troop-contributing countries have a responsibility to protect civilians, but that responsibility is shared with both the Security Council and the Secretariat. In order to make it possible for troops to fulfil their missions successfully, the Council needs to take into account the realities on the ground and provide United Nations forces with adequate means. The Secretariat should also strengthen its cooperation with troop contributors and involve them more in the planning phases. Those elements attest to the importance of revised and strengthened triangular cooperation, aimed at identifying possible obstacles and at enabling deployed troops to fulfil their mandate successfully. Such discussions could be held in the context of informal Security Council working groups on the protection of civilians and working groups on peacekeeping.

The conduct of Blue Helmets responsible for the protection of civilians should be irreproachable. Morocco firmly supports the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy and has taken specific measures in that area. Morocco systematically sends national investigators to its deployed troops, so as to deal with any situation that might arise with the greatest diligence and firmness. Once again, improved cooperation with the Secretariat is necessary, especially in the area of sharing information. All of those elements should be

taken into account during the upcoming review of the matter during the meetings of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate Morocco's firm commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which is an imperative, be it in the context of troops committed to serve under the United Nations flag or in the form of programmes to strengthen the capacity of States. We hope that the ideas and proposals put forth during this debate will be implemented concretely in order to improve the protection of civilians on the ground. We must pursue our collective mobilization in order to initiate changes that are awaited by millions of people in conflict situations around the world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Paraguay.

Mr. González Franco (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate the Government of Uruguay on its initiative to convene this open debate on an issue that, unfortunately, is still current, even after the heartbreaking experiences of two world wars and countless armed conflicts.

In an armed conflict, the protection of any individual who is not a party to hostilities is an obligation that the States at war cannot avoid, even if they are not parties to the Geneva Conventions, since that obligation is enshrined in international humanitarian law and is of a customary nature. Armed conflicts have been changing. Today, they have little in common with the conflicts of the nineteenth century, which took place on defined battlefields, far from populated areas, and were between armies of different States. Such armed conflicts are now the exception. Unconventional conflicts are now the norm and, increasingly, it is civilians who indiscriminately suffer their consequences.

For Paraguay, the increased number of unconventional conflicts and the new technologies in no way challenge the applicability of the Geneva Conventions. We believe that the concern of the international community should be focused on developing their provisions and their Additional Protocols, in order to avoid legal gaps that could impede their implementation in given conflicts, which would be mainly to the detriment of the affected civilian population. For that reason, it is vital that the issue of defining an armed conflict be properly debated. Not defining a situation as an armed conflict implies the non-application of the norms of international humanitarian law, and can therefore lead to a lack of protection for civilians, particularly the most vulnerable civilians — those who, for the simple fact of being present at the wrong place or time, are trapped in conflicts between States and non-State or transnational armed groups or in conflicts between such groups, or have been subjected to kidnapping, torture, forced recruitment, inhuman or degrading treatment or displacement from their homes and separation from their families.

We are convinced that political will is one of the main factors needed to ensure that civilians, irrespective of their nationality or any other social, economic, cultural, religious or other condition, are protected and that their human dignity is safeguarded, particularly through respect for, and the enforcement of, international law and accountability, when those laws are violated. We appeal to States, in all situations, when faced with the imperative of military requirements, to always choose the humanitarian imperative to protect. In that regard, we encourage the Council to ensure that such a choice is made at every point in time, irrespective of who the parties to the conflict are. We reaffirm that negotiation and political agreements in conflicts represent the best guarantee for protecting individuals and achieving lasting and sustainable peace. We emphasize that that is a matter in which the Security Council must play a major role.

Finally, Paraguay reiterates its support for the view that all civilians have the right to be protected, and that, when referring to the most vulnerable, such as children, women or the elderly, the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution should serve as the basic guideline for all actions on the part of parties to armed conflicts.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Menkveld (Netherlands): I would like to thank the delegation of Uruguay for organizing this open debate on the important topic of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I would also like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Eliasson; the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Ms. Beerli; and the representative of Oxfam, Ms. Rooijmans, for their valuable contributions to today's debate. I align myself with the statement by the Observer of the European Union.

As we see in today's conflicts in Syria, Libya, Yemen and elsewhere, it is the civilian population, including

women and children, that is the main victim of brutal violence. The recent images coming out of Madaya and elsewhere speak for themselves. We are appalled by the fact that besieging civilian populations has become a means of war. The appeal by the Secretary-General and the President of the ICRC last October to act effectively, decisively and in a timely manner to protect civilians in conflict was unprecedented and is a strong wake-up call for all of us.

The international community should address the importance of the protection of civilians at the highest political level. In this respect, I stress the importance of timely briefings by the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect in contributing to early awareness of potential crises. This approach is in line with the Human Rights up Front initiative. I also would like to emphasize that the responsibility to protect and international humanitarian and human rights law, including the protection of civilians in armed conflict, are mutually reinforcing.

Today, I would like to make the following three points in relation to the protection of civilians: first, the importance of compliance with international humanitarian law; secondly, monitoring peace operations in conjunction with consultation with troop-contributing countries, and thirdly, the training of peacekeepers.

First, with respect to compliance with international humanitarian law, the Kingdom of the Netherlands regrets that is was not possible to agree on the establishment of a new mechanism to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law at the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Indeed, international humanitarian law, when respected by all the parties, offers the best protection for civilians during armed conflict. However, on a daily basis, we are faced with the harsh reality of systematic and often deliberate non-compliance with international humanitarian law. We need to strengthen our efforts towards the realization of a widely supported State-led compliance mechanism. We owe this to all those civilians in conflict situations that are currently not being protected as required by international humanitarian law.

Secondly, with respect to peace operations, the Security Council could monitor more closely whether peacekeepers do what is asked of them in a mandate. Leadership and proper guidance on the protection of civilians are necessary elements in the success and credibility of a mission. Mission leadership should take full responsibility and be held accountable for how well a mission protects civilians. That includes the use of force beyond self-defence to protect civilians when it is necessary to fulfil the tasks set forth under the mandate. And all missions should report when peacekeepers fail in the area of protection of civilians. The Netherlands underlines the importance of the Security Council consulting in a more structural manner with countries deploying troops and police to United Nations missions. We welcome current efforts to have informal meetings in advance of mandate renewals.

Finally, with respect to the training of peacekeepers, in May last year the Kingdom of the Netherlands participated in a conference on the protection of civilians organized by Rwanda in the run-up to the Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping in September. We were among the first signatories of the Kigali Principles that were presented at that conference. These principles provide clear and straightforward recommendations on how to effectively implement protection of civilians mandates in peacekeeping operations. In particular, they focus on building peacekeeper capacity when it comes to the protection of civilians. Together with Rwanda and the United States, we are currently developing a tailor-made training on the protection of civilians, as part of the pledge we made during the Leaders' Summit.

The main objectives of this training are to apply a comprehensive approach in peacekeeping to the protection of civilians in armed conflict and develop leadership on translating military and civilian mission responsibilities into timely and decisive action in the area of protection of civilians. A pilot run of the training will take place this spring. We look forward to sharing the concrete results and good practices obtained.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to serve as a constructive partner on issues of peacekeeping reform. We advocate for an integrated approach to peace operations, combining efforts in the fields of political dialogue, conflict prevention and the rule of law, protection of civilians, gender and development.

The report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446) provides valuable recommendations for strengthening United Nations peace operations. The Kingdom of the Netherlands has supported the work of this panel and looks forward

to further discussions on the implementation of the recommendations. The Kingdom of the Netherlands remains fully committed to peace operations in the years ahead, building on a strong and long-standing tradition of active involvement in participating in United Nations missions across the globe.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Sandoval Cojulún (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the delegation of Uruguay for organizing today's open debate and the briefers for their respective statements. We also welcome the concept note circulated by the presidency to focus our debate (S/2016/22, annex).

The current humanitarian crises facing the international community require the attention of us all. The number of displaced persons and refugees and the degree of human suffering recorded in recent months are causing great consternation. We condemn the violations of international humanitarian law and of human rights by certain States and non-State armed groups, as well as their impunity for these violations and abuses. Humanitarian access should be provided to meet the basic needs of civilian populations in conflict in a timely manner and without any hindrance.

Our delegation, as a troop-contributing country, echoes the remarks made by Mr. Eliasson and the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations. The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a basic principle of international humanitarian law, a fundamental task of the Security Council and a moral responsibility of the United Nations.

Peacekeeping operations have evolved, and international protection has been strengthened through the implementation of specific mandates. We believe that this evolution has been positive, as it has given priority to some aspects of the broad scope of the protection of civilians, particularly the protection of children and women in conflict situations. But the challenges are multiple, and we therefore recognize that there should be better coordination in order to strengthen the role of the United Nations, particularly with regard to strict compliance with the zero-tolerance policy for all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. In this regard, we welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General to step up the Organization's prevention, implementation and troubleshooting activities in relation to all forms of misconduct.

The protection of civilians is a legal obligation. We must demand that members of the security forces, local militias or other armed groups who have committed violations of international humanitarian law or human rights be held to account. We reaffirm that it is the primary responsibility of the troop- and police-contributing countries to investigate without delay any allegations of sexual exploitation or abuse.

Women and girls are the ones who suffer the most devastating impact of armed conflict, particularly due to the increasingly widespread use of gender-based violence. However, women should not be considered only as victims of war. They are the ones who ensure the family's survival in the midst of chaos and destruction. They participate actively in the promotion of peace within their communities. However, it is undeniable that there is room for improvement in promoting women's participation at the negotiating table and in their role as mediators, negotiators and technical experts in peace processes.

Moreover, it is a source of concern to witness the emergence of new and more radical groups, which have changed the landscape of armed conflict. That is why we believe that the focus on the protection of civilians must evolve according to changing circumstances.

It is vital to build the capacity of public institutions, which often are either dismantled or weakened following conflict. That, in turn, requires, among other things, guaranteeing that the practice of protection be both more coherent and more effective, and also providing training to such forces. United Nations troops cannot substitute for the State in the discharge of its responsibility to protect its civilian population. When States are unable or unwilling to honour this basic commitment, major humanitarian disasters ensue.

It is vital that all instruments available to the Council be used coherently, that they be adapted to the type of crime perpetrated and that they contain strong elements of deterrence, accountability and justice, in cooperation with, inter alia, the International Criminal Court. The lessons learned from conflict, from the worst failures to best practices, should serve as a useful guide in that endeavour.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Armenia.

Mr. Sargsyan (Armenia): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for the choice of the theme of the present debate. Throughout 2015 we were equipped with a considerable number of important analyses on the state of play within the United Nations, including the report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/453) and those of the Advisory Group of Experts (A/69/968) and the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446).

We share the concern of the Secretary-General about the disturbing challenges in the area of the protection of civilians in conflict-affected areas, which remain as persistent as ever. While the humanitarian aspects of the populations affected are of deep concern, the basic physical security of civilians continues to be compromised by, as the Secretary-General stated in paragraph 4 of his report, "shocking levels of brutality and casual disregard for human life". The fact that considerable progress has been achieved in strengthening the normative framework for the protection of civilians, is, of course, commendable. However, the persistently rising number of civilian casualties calls for resolute action.

The analyses available are good enough only when they are acted upon. They are sufficiently comprehensive in defining ways of strengthening the capacities of all major actors in the function of prevention. We are willing to share some of our thinking on certain aspects of these analyses.

First, the question of accountability requires greater consolidation of the Council in demonstrating its resolve against the parties responsible for denying basic security or humanitarian relief to affected populations.

Secondly, the idea of giving United Nations peace operations a mandate for a preventive, protective and tactical use of force to protect civilians under threat of physical violence needs to be given thorough consideration. The reputation of the Organization is judged not by its words of condemnation but by deliverable protection.

Thirdly, United Nations field missions remain an important source of information in detecting deteriorating situations and alerting the Organization to take early action. Prevention, as has often been recognized in all of the available analyses, is the best means of protection. Strengthening the capacities of field missions, including those of the relevant regional organizations, to this end remains an ongoing priority.

Last but not least, the protection of civilians in armed conflict is closely tied to the prevention of mass atrocities, including the crime of genocide. Once again, we stress the importance of the Office of the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect in detecting emerging risks. A culture of assessing every crisis situation affecting the civilian population through the prism of atrocity crimes, including the crime of genocide, should be further cultivated within the Organization.

Most recently, Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh have been experiencing significant challenges to the security of the civilian population as a result of the ongoing disregard by Azerbaijan for respecting and upholding the 1994 ceasefire agreement. Increasingly, Azerbaijan continues to target civilians across the line of contact with Nagorno Karabakh and the border with Armenia. As a result of intensified ceasefire violations and the massive shelling of populated areas with the unprecedented use of heavy artillery, considerable damage has been inflicted on the livelihoods of the bordering villages. In September 2015, three women were killed by Azerbaijani fire. Armenia strongly deplores Azerbaijan's intentional acts aimed at violating the ceasefire regime and damaging the ongoing peace process within the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairmanship.

Once again, Armenia urges Azerbaijan to heed the calls of the international community and to agree without delay, as a first step, to establish a mechanism for investigating the ceasefire violations and to withdraw its snipers. By rejecting such a mechanism, Azerbaijan bears full responsibility for the violations and the escalation of tensions.

To conclude, the ongoing negotiations for the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship is a positive example of the effective utilization of the capacity of regional organizations in conflict resolution. It is an example of what the Secretary-General describes as a pragmatic approach to a global-regional partnership.

Armenia highly commends the support of the international community, the United Nations and the Secretary-General for the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship in the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijan should be

denied the possibility of attempting to undermine the efforts of the co-Chairs or to engage in forum and mediation shopping.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Estreme (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like at the outset to congratulate Uruguay on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January and to say how pleased we are to see Uruguay in the Council once again. Mr. President, based on your country's diplomatic skill and experience, we are convinced that you will make an important contribution to the work of the Security Council during your two-year term of office. I should like also to thank you, Sir, for having convened this debate, and to thank the briefers for the information provided.

Unfortunately, the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2015/453) reaffirms that civilians continue to constitute the majority of victims in such conflicts. The lack of distinction between combatants and civilians results in civilians being killed, wounded or displaced and in situations where there are serious impediments to, if not outright attacks on, the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Security Council must therefore remain committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict through the promotion of the full respect for international law, in particular international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law, as well as through the fight against impunity.

The authorization by the Council of robust mandates and the implementation thereof by peacekeeping operations should not compromise the discharge of such operations' fundamental mandate to protect civilians or distract them from their mission. Peacekeeping operations must have clear mandates and be provided with the resources necessary to implement them in a timely and effective manner.

Many of these concepts are contained in the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) and in the report of the Secretary-General on peacekeeping operations. However, one aspect that has not been sufficiently addressed in these documents and that my delegation wishes to emphasize is the obligation of United Nations forces to respect international humanitarian law.

In that context, I would like to recall the Secretary-General's Bulletin (ST/SGB/1999/13) on the observance by United Nations forces of international humanitarian law. Argentina hopes that the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations will address this matter at its next session, in March. We emphasize that it would be appropriate for the Security Council, in its pronouncements, to include a reminder, which is always useful, that the forces of the United Nations, as well as those involved in operations authorized by the Council, are also bound by international humanitarian law.

With regard to humanitarian assistance, the parties to a conflict should make every effort to ensure that effective and timely access to humanitarian action is guaranteed, including shipments and equipment. Such assistance enjoys special protection under international humanitarian law, which is why it is troubling that, in many situations, access to humanitarian assistance has been impeded or even denied. It is in that context that my delegation expresses its deep concern about and condemnation of recent events in Syria, in particular with regard to the cases mentioned this morning by the Deputy Secretary-General, and in recent days by the Secretary-General, with particular regard to the city of Madaya. It is imperative that humanitarian assistance reach the civilian population to avoid starvation. We recall, as mentioned by both the Deputy Secretary-General and the Secretary-General, that the intentional use of starvation against the civilian population as a tactic of war, including by deliberately obstructing the provision of relief assistance, is a serious violation of international humanitarian law and a war crime.

It is clear that the first challenge is to promote compliance with the relevant standards. The existing regulatory framework for the protection of civilians must be translated into concrete results on the ground. Argentina considers it a priority to continue the debate on setting up new mechanisms to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law, as well as to foment a constructive, transparent and inclusive dialogue among States and other stakeholders. One way to accomplish that would be to establish a forum in which States can meet regularly to exchange views on relevant issues — a possibility that was discussed during the thirty-second International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and which will remain under consideration for the next few years.

The Council should strengthen its efforts to promote respect for international humanitarian law.

In that regard, Argentina believes that accountability mechanisms play a preventive role. Impartial mechanisms are essential to the investigation of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. Ad hoc commissions of inquiry, including those established by the Human Rights Council, are important. In that regard, I would like to emphasize the work of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission provided for in the Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949. We hope that the Security Council will continue to recognize the possibility of using the Commission, as expressed in resolution 1894 (2009) and presidential statement S/PRST/2013/2.

Also in relation to the need to strengthen accountability by those responsible for heinous crimes, Argentina stresses the role of the International Criminal Court. It is important that States parties to the Rome Statute adopt the necessary norms to that end. The cooperation of all States with the Court is also essential. Moreover, it is necessary that the Security Council strengthen its commitment to combat impunity for such crimes. In that regard, the implementation of a method to effectively monitor Council referrals to the International Criminal Court is a much-delayed necessity. We urge the Council to implement the commitment it made in the aforementioned presidential statement.

In conclusion, I reiterate that, in accordance with international humanitarian law and Council resolutions, any attacks against civilians, in particular women and children, or other protected persons, schools, cultural property and places of worship, as well as the recruitment of children and the obstruction of access of humanitarian assistance, constitute a violation of international law. In that context, we reiterate that medical and hospital personnel cannot be attacked, and we condemn the numerous cases where such has occurred, in particular the attacks in Yemen and elsewhere against Doctors Without Borders, about which we heard testimony.

Finally, I wish once again to urge strict compliance with the obligations arising from The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907; the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977; international human rights law; international refugee law and Security Council resolutions.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Montenegro.

Mr. Perović (Montenegro): We thank you, Mr. President, for holding this important debate on the protection of civilians and commend Uruguay's strong commitment to the issue. We also thank today's briefers for their valuable presentations, which reminded us that this agenda item continues to be of relevance to the Security Council.

Montenegro aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer European Union. I would like, however, to make some remarks in my national capacity.

Every day we are reminded that the rules and principles of international humanitarian law to protect civilians from the effects of military operations are challenged and, unfortunately, often ignored. Deliberate targeting, indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks, and sexual and gender-based violence are just a few examples of this troubling and worsening trend, which we have witnessed in Syria, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Iraq. The sad reality is that civilians still account for a high proportion of the victims in most armed conflicts.

When something such as the death and suffering of civilians, especially women and children, happens, people across the world look to the United Nations and its peacekeepers for reassurance and protection. And we ask ourselves what more could be done to prevent it and how to practically improve civilian protection in conflict. We have seen a number of important and positive developments relating to the protection of civilians. However, the Security Council must do more than address the issue of the protection of civilians at the thematic level. Our close attention, decisive action and full engagement in the implementation of this agenda item in practice is needed to protect civilians and ensure that the perpetrators of grave violations against civilians are brought to account.

More importance needs to be given to the protection of civilians in conflict zones, and to the refugees who have fled them. We must do all we can to reduce suffering, allow humanitarian access, build trust and protect civilians. Civilians trapped in today's conflict areas cannot wait for the conclusion of political processes before they receive assistance. There can be no justification for any country that stands in the way of a resolution designed to allow civilians access to

food and medical assistance. Preventing humanitarian access by indiscriminate attacks is a great crime, and an important role of the Council is to ensure accountability for such violations.

Montenegro is of the view that early action to prevent conflict and mass human rights abuses is essential. We recognize the valuable progress made in the area of enhancing the implementation of protection mandates by United Nations peacekeeping and other missions.

Priority should be given to the protection of civilians in mission-planning assessments, the allocation of resources, and in activities on the ground. The challenges of protecting civilians appear to be increasing. Logistics, mobility and rapid response challenges in difficult environments, in the midst of armed conflicts, some in the presence of violent extremist groups, are very significant. However, protecting civilians is not just the responsibility of uniformed peacekeepers, but also the primary responsibility of States. It is therefore essential that we take up our responsibilities and use the Council's authority to ensure that States shoulder their primary responsibility to prevent conflict and minimize suffering. Civilians, as well as non-governmental organizations and communities themselves, play an important role in that regard.

The emergence of new challenges to international peace and security implies a greater role for new technology. The predeployment training of troops that are ready and willing to meet evolving threats is crucial in order to be effective.

The protection of civilians from the ravages of conflict is vital to the mission of the Security Council; it is what the United Nations is ultimately judged upon. This is a challenging time for taking action. Montenegro remains committed to contributing to the common objective of protecting the lives of women, men, girls and boys from the consequences of conflicts.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): We convey our appreciation to the your presidency, Sir, for organizing today's debate.

As one of the leading troop-contributing countries, Bangladesh has usually taken a pragmatic approach to the protection-of-civilians mandate in both practice and preparedness, while adhering to the underlying principles of peacekeeping operations. Being part of most of the highly challenging United Nations peacekeeping missions, we can see the relevance of the protection-of-civilians mandate first-hand on the ground — and, in a number of cases, tackled it with professionalism and some degree of creativity, even when the mandate was not laid out in clear, specific terms.

We have incorporated a comprehensive protection-of-civilians component in our peacekeeping training curriculums, with built-in demonstration exercises. In 2014, our premiere peace support operations training institute organized a customized training course on the protection of civilians, through the United Nations Mobile Training Team and with support from Japan. As announced by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the summit on peacekeeping last year, we shall continue to further mainstream the protection of civilians into the peacekeeping training programmes designed for our troops and police.

Drawing on our overall experience, we would make five observations concerning the protection of civilians, including in the context of peacekeeping mandates.

First, there needs to be greater emphasis on strategic analysis and an assessment of threats to civilians so that the Security Council can clearly set out its expectations regarding the implementation of peacekeeping mandates to protect civilians. To that effect, it is imperative to have meaningful coordination and consultation among the Security Council, troop- and police-contributing countries, the Secretariat and country teams, with a view to improving guidance to the missions and promoting a mission-wide coherent approach to protecting civilians.

Secondly, in order to be effective, protection-of-civilians mandates require the continued political support of the Security Council, the main parties to the conflict and, in particular, host Governments. Protection-of-civilians mandates need to be backed by viable strategies and adequate resources so that the missions' capacity does not fail when faced with belligerence from the parties to the conflict or the lack of will or capacity of the host Governments to cooperate.

Thirdly, concerted efforts are needed to bring clarity to the operational aspects of the protection-of-civilians mandates and to eliminate confusion as to who to protect, so as to effectively reduce the gaps between

mandate design and implementation. Unpleasant though it may sound, with limited presence and resources in relatively large conflict areas, it is crucial to appreciate that peacekeeping missions cannot always protect everyone from everything and that the Council is therefore required to manage expectations.

Fourthly, the ongoing global campaign to end violence against women and children in armed conflicts should gather further momentum to garner the support of all State and non-State actors. Resolution 1325 (2000) and its successor resolutions provide an excellent basis for effective national strategies developed through an inclusive, consultative process. We must uphold our zero-tolerance approach to any aberration by peacekeepers to set the standards for dealing with sexual and gender-based crimes.

Lastly, the renewed attention to ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law and invoking the norms of international criminal justice have resulted in enhanced awareness on the prevention and accountability aspects of the protection of civilians. We have seen the benefits of setting up a national international humanitarian law committee, as advocated by the International Committee of the Red Cross, and would urge that the existing accountability mechanisms inherent in international humanitarian law be utilized to their full potential. While we will continue to promote the universalization of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, we would underscore the need to give due recognition to national efforts to seek justice for crimes against humanity and other international crimes committed against civilians.

The security and protection of civilians in today's asymmetrical conflict environment are now increasingly seen as linked to the legitimacy and credibility of United Nations peace operations and its humanitarian assistance. As a number of seminal reports last year duly underlined, the protection of civilians through military means alone will always fall short unless they are vigorously supported by meaningful political processes to establish lasting peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Lithuania.

Mrs. Jakubonė (Lithuania): I thank you, Mr. President, for having convened today's debate, and all the briefers for their important contributions and insights.

The protection of civilians was one of the main priorities of Lithuania's membership on the Security Council, on which we organized two debates and an Arria Formula meeting focused on the implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates by peacekeeping operations, the protection of journalists in armed conflicts, and human rights issues in peacekeeping operations. We believe that the protection of civilians should remain firmly embedded on the Council's agenda.

Lithuania aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union. In my national capacity, let me touch upon early warning, prevention and accountability in relation to the protection of civilians.

With regard to early warning, more needs to be done to alert the Council to potential crises, with the aim of defusing conflicts before they erupt. United Nations teams on the ground have an important role to play in sensing the early signals of potential crises and alerting the Secretariat. Positive steps have been taken by the Department of Political Affairs in that respect, such as informal briefings to Council members. In our view, such briefings, as well as horizon-scanning exercises, should remain part of the toolbox at the Council's disposal.

Close interaction with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is essential in the context of early warning, as human rights abuses and discrimination of individual groups within a society often signal more trouble to come. The Secretary-General bringing specific situations to the Council's attention is another important tool, which, in our view, could be more actively used. The now prevalent reluctance and taboo of taking up situations before they explode in the Council's face cost too many human lives and destroy many others. The sooner issues are brought to the Council's attention, the better the chances for preventive action.

Stronger mediation capacity, the good offices of the Secretary-General and early engagement with, and the involvement of, regional and subregional organizations are key. We appreciate the mediation work of the Department of Political Affairs, and we call for better and more predictable support for such efforts. As we call on countries to ensure that women have a seat at the negotiating table, we should also make sure that more female mediators are actively engaged on the ground.

We therefore encourage countries to submit more female candidatures for mediation rosters. Overall, a greater presence of female peacekeepers, police officers and protection advisers on the ground does matter. They have better chances to establish communication and trust with female victims, especially where customs and taboos are rigid, and provide unique insights and perspectives in adjusting mission protection mandates. In the context of the review of peace operations, it would be useful to consider how best to encourage troop-contributing countries and police-contributing countries to step up their efforts in that regard.

Prevention on the ground also requires a more diverse array of physical tools in the hands of peacekeepers. Here at the Council, force commanders have spoken repeatedly about the utility of unmanned aerial vehicles for preventive or salvage purposes. Among other things, unmanned aerial vehicles, night vision capabilities and the use of cellular or satellite communications for early warning would enable better protection and more lives to be saved.

Finally, let me turn to the issue of accountability. The state of impunity for crimes and attacks against civilian populations, humanitarian aid and medical workers, schools, and journalists working in conflict zones is shocking. In Syria, the worst humanitarian crisis of the century — with barrel bombings, sieges, the use of starvation as a method of war, killings, torture and chemical attacks — is taking place with total impunity. According to the World Health Organization, the year 2015 in Syria was the worst-ever for attacks on medical facilities, with Government forces responsible for most of the attacks, including by double-tap barrel bombing. Since September of last year, Russian air strikes have compounded the damage and destruction incurred by health facilities, medical staff and patients. In the Central African Republic, more than 200 attacks were perpetrated against humanitarian organizations in 2015, thereby hindering safe access to those in need of immediate assistance. In Yemen last year, nearly 100 hospitals were attacked by the parties to the conflict. Attacks on humanitarian and medical facilities and staff have taken a heavy toll in Afghanistan, Libya, South Sudan and elsewhere. In eastern Ukraine, occupying mercenary forces created a climate of abysmal lawlessness. Over 1 million people were forced to flee, and some 30,000 people were wounded or killed.

In those and other conflicts, we cannot succeed in protecting civilians, when those who commit abuses, crimes and atrocities know that they can get away with murder — literally. The Council has a critical role to play in bringing the perpetrators to account by taking a strong and systematic position on ending impunity for war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity and gross violations of human rights. My delegation reiterates the call to restrain the use of the right to veto in situations where such crimes are committed. Perpetrators of crimes against civilian populations and those who attack and kill humanitarian and medical workers and journalists must know that there is no escaping justice. National and international justice mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, have an important role to play in that regard.

Accountability must also be assured wherever and whenever peacekeepers engage in the sexual exploitation and abuse of the most vulnerable. While the onus is on respective troop-contributing countries to bring the perpetrators to account, the Secretariat too has an array of tools to combat the situation, including the removal of offending troops. The Secretary-General should continue to report to the Council on the efforts and measures taken to eradicate sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers.

In conclusion, no normative base, as perfect as it may be, will in itself protect civilians if gaps remain between the norm and the actions on the ground. We have to use all of the available tools to ensure the protection of civilian populations, including through the Human Rights Up Front initiative. More broadly, we have to redouble our efforts in implementing Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1), as the best chance we have at prevention.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Gabon.

Mr. Ndong Ella (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes your initiative, Mr. President, to organize this high-level debate on the important issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Gabon fully appreciates the untiring commitment and mobilization of the Security Council and the efforts and determination on the part of the Secretary-General,

which amply demonstrate the particular interest that they accord to that matter. I take this opportunity to pay heartfelt tribute to the Blue Helmets and humanitarian organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, who work every day and risk their lives to protect and provide for the needs of civilians in situations of very complicated conflicts.

As the Council is aware, civilians, especially women and children, are the main targets of the abuses committed in armed conflict situations. They are particularly subject to violence, sexual slavery, hostage-taking, discrimination and other forms of abuse that constitute serious violations of international law and human rights. Gabon therefore endorses the recommendations of the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/453), published in June 2015, which highlights the fact that civilian populations are increasingly becoming the targets of attacks in armed conflicts. The same endorsement applies to the recommendations contained in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446), which underscores the limits of humanitarian action with regard to the intensity and complexity of conflicts. Gabon, under the leadership of His Excellency Mr. Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of the Republic and Head of State, attaches high priority at all times and in all circumstances to the protection of vulnerable populations, especially women, children, the disabled and the elderly.

As we recalled during the debate on the question woman and peace and security (see S/PV.7534), the protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of states themselves, in times of peace and during armed conflict. Beyond the responsibility of States, the protection of civilians must be exercised within conflict zones and at the very heart of peace operations. Concerning the first point, it is important to provide peacekeeping missions with a robust mandate to protect civilians in line with the realities on the ground. That is already the case in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic must reach full operational capacity through a robust mandate, as well. Moreover, that reflects one of the recommendations adopted by the Heads of State and Government at the Extraordinary Summit of the Economic Community of Central African States held in Gabon on 25 November 2015. Similarly, it is necessary for the Security Council to strengthen its own sanctions mechanisms against State and non-State actors guilty of abuses against civilians.

We regret the increasing number of cases of sexual abuse and exploitation perpetrated by the very people who are supposed to ensure the protection civilians. Gabon reiterates its full support of the Secretary-General's new policy of zero tolerance. The protection of civilians goes hand-in-hand with justice. In that light, soldiers and officers guilty of such heinous crimes must be punished to set an example.

Prevention also requires that civilians can enjoy effective protection. To that end, human rights must be at the heart of prevention mechanisms more than ever. The particular offices of peacekeeping operations devoted to human rights, gender equality and the protection of civilian populations must anticipate potential threats by sounding the alarm to avoid any further degradation of the situation. It is also in that context that the increased participation of women in peacekeeping operations can promote a climate of trust between peacekeepers and local communities. Women's contribution could consist of working with communities to provide psychological support the victims of violence and seeing them through to their full reintegration into their communities.

My delegation has the highest appreciation for the role played by the United Nations via the deploymnet of peacekeeping operations in war-torn countries. Yet we must recognize that such missions are dangerous and often unfortunately result in the loss of numerous peacekeeping soldiers' lives. I take this opportunity to condemn all attacks against Blue Helmets, humanitarian workers and journalists, as they constitute serious violations of the principles and provisions of international humanitarian law.

In conclusioon, Gabon supports the call of the Secretary-General call aimed at promoting the political settlement of conflicts and ensuring the promotion of human rights, the rule of law and good governance .

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Mr. Téte António, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations.

Mr. António (*spoke in French*): Allow me, at the outset, Mr. President, to express my sincere congratulations on your delegation's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January, which also coincides with the beginning of

your country's tenure in this organ. My congratulations also go to the other new members — Egypt, Senegal, Ukraine and Japan — to which I wish every success. I also thank the Deputy Secretary-General, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Oxfam Advisor for their briefings.

This debate on the theme of the protection civilians in armed conflict is a timely one. As we look at the theatres of armed conflict today and the recent developments there, we are reminded of the harsh reality facing civilians, who continue to be number among the first victims in armed conflicts. The indiscriminate and often deliberate attacks against civilians and humanitarian aid workers have become increasingly frequent in the past decade, as stated in the Secretary-General's June 2015 report (S/2015/453) on the protection of civilians. That harsh reality has become commonplace and has reached unacceptable levels in terms of the numbers and the degree of atrocities, notwithstanding the international legal framework that sanctifies human life. It is therefore evident that the problem is not due to any lack of an international framework for the protection of civilians; rather, it is due to the absence of implementation, including in those areas controlled by armed non-State actors or terrorist groups.

Terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham and other opposing forces that are challenging all fundamental rights are primarily responsible for the violence committed against civilians in Africa. Moreover, peacekeeping operations, which are the primary instrument of the United Nations to ensure the protection of civilians in armed conflict, are facing increasingly complex challenges, which has weakened their capacity to fulfil their protection mandates. The emergence of non-State armed actors and the increase in terrorism and violent extremism, as well as other related threats, serve rightly to underscore the need to adapt the concept of peacekeeping to those new realities while moving towards greater flexibility in the interpretation of traditional principles that have guided United Nations work in this area.

Such an approach will mean that we must find a balance between, on the one hand, maintaining important aspects of the traditional principles of peacekeeping and, on the other hand, the utilization of force by operations that are deployed, particularly in Africa. The recent experience in Somalia and the Sahel demonstrates that it is timely and viable to use peacekeeping when it is a matter of combating such terrorist groups.

The resolute political will and sustained commitment of the African Union leaders with regard to the protection of civilian populations from the horrors of war has made non-indifference to human suffering a fundamental principle. The African Union approach in terms of peacekeeping, which is essentially based on that cardinal principle, has demonstrated our continental organization's capacity to adapt and respond to new challenges, particularly through the following means.

First, we are involved in the deployment of peacekeeping operations in extremely hostile and unstable environments where no other organization is ready to venture.

Secondly, we have put in place robust mandates for African Union operations, which, in most cases, have among their main missions to protect civilians, to neutralize armed groups and terrorists and to promote the authority of the State.

It should be emphasized that the practices of the African Union in the area of peacekeeping mark an advance when compared to those of the United Nations. They therefore prompt us to rethink the model of cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations pursuant to Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. The model adapted to the circumstances I have described must also take into account how African Union operations are financed through contributions to the regular budget of the United Nations.

Along with its operations on the ground, the African Union is investing in finding political solutions, as evidenced by our recent involvement in efforts to conclude peace agreements in Mali and in the Central African Republic, among places. In other situations, including in Somalia, the African Union continues to seek to reduce violence in order to encourage all stakeholders to relaunch the political process. As the Secretary-General highlights in his report (S/2015/682) on the implementation of recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, political solutions must be at the heart of all strategies that seek to ensure lasting protection for civilians. In that context, the African Union, faithful to its tradition of the peaceful resolution of conflicts, remains convinced

that negotiation and mediation are the main tools that should be more encouraged and explored in finding political solutions to conflicts.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Albania.

Mr. Nina (Albania): At the outset, allow me to than you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate on the topic of the protection of civilians in conflicts during your first month of Security Council membership, as well as for the concept note (S/2016/22, annex).

Albania aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union. Allow me to make the following remarks in my national capacity.

The protection of civilians provided by international humanitarian law is quite extensive; however, as in the past, in all ongoing conflicts, the difficulties are related to its application. As accurately pointed out in the Secretary-General's report of 18 June 2015, unfortunately, in many parts of the world, the situation has deteriorated significantly. It is outrageous, as rightly noted in the report, inter alia, that

> "[d]irect attacks on schools and hospitals have become common features of many armed conflicts. Humanitarian and health-care workers are deliberately targeted." (*S/2015/453, para. 4*)

On a daily basis, across the world, we see a widespread failure to respect international humanitarian law, which is the duty of all States and non-State actors, pursuant to the Geneva Conventions. In ongoing conflicts, civilians have been specifically targeted and subjected to terrible atrocities, which ignores the very basis of the Geneva Conventions: respect for the human person. It is shocking that, in the twenty-first century, the outbreak, continuation and escalation of armed conflicts and the recurrence of violence in post-conflict settings all over the world have taken a dramatic toll on civilians, in particular for the most vulnerable — women and children, older persons, the disabled, internally displaced persons and refugees.

Neither States nor non-State armed groups have respected their obligations adequately, including during the past 16 years, during which the Council has established a robust normative framework for the protection of civilians. Furthermore, every passing year, the consensus grows stronger around the idea that the protection of civilians lies with the State, but it is also a legitimate and necessary focus of collective action by the international community. But progress made at the normative level makes sense only if translated into tangible action on the ground. On that, unfortunately, we have to concur with the conclusion in the Secretary-General's report that

> "the task of protecting civilians on the ground has been more pronounced in its failures than its successes" (*ibid, para. 6*).

That sad reality shows that much more needs to be done to reverse the catastrophic consequences of the continued actions by terrorist groups. It is therefore important to recall the need for the Security Council to act swiftly and resolutely in all situations affecting civilians. The Security Council should be given credit for the fact that, by creating the International Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and by referring the situations in Darfur and Libya to the International Criminal Court (ICC), it has itself sent out important messages. It is therefore equally important that, when a peace operation is to be deployed in an ICC-situation country, its mandate should authorize it to assist the ICC, which is an important step towards providing justice by making those responsible for human rights violations accountable.

For a number of years, the mandates of many United Nations peacekeeping and other missions have included the protection of civilians. Albania believes that, for future missions, it will be increasingly crucial for information to be gathered from current global missions in order to evaluate, analyse and contextualize their work, specifically on civilian protection. That is why there is a need to match the protection mandates for peacekeepers with appropriate resources, providing specific training on civilian protection, including training on child protection, measures against sexual exploitation and abuse as well as developing civilian protection doctrines and practical guidance. Any abuse at the hands of peacekeepers — in other words, of those mandated to protect — is unacceptable for international peacekeeping. Moreover, we strongly support the United Nations zero-tolerance policy.

We reaffirm the need to carefully plan peacekeeping operations and to conduct them in such a manner so as to facilitate post-conflict peacebuilding and progress towards sustainable peace, stability and development. We also believe that the implementation

of such activities requires close coordination between peacekeeping, United Nations country teams and development actors.

On a final note, we would like to point out that we have entered an era in which armed conflicts are greater in complexity and in the numbers of actors, broader in tactics and weapons used and, above all, more horrific in the human suffering they cause. The international community's response should also be adapted to the new reality and the challenges we all face. We therefore reiterate the call to the Council to provide consistent political and operational support for the protection of civilians in conflict, including where State parties are involved in attacks and atrocities against civilians.

Next year's World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul will be an opportunity for all of us to renew and further the commitment for a world of peace, security and sustainable development. Unless we adopt more effective ways to address the suffering of civilians in armed conflict, we cannot aspire to meeting the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1), whereby no one should be left behind.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): Allow me to express our appreciation to the Uruguayan presidency for organizing this timely debate. I would also like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General for his statement, as well as the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Oxfam representative for their briefings.

Today we are confronted with increasingly complex challenges against international peace and security. The elimination of conflicts stands out as a challenge that the international community still needs to deliver on 70 years after the foundation of the United Nations. The severe effects of conflicts on civilians constitute a significant problem that needs addressing. Furthermore, our world is now facing the largest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, with an increasing influx of displaced populations due to protracted conflicts and a lack of security and stability. In line with the road map established by the Secretary-General, the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit, to be held in Istanbul in May, will be a major opportunity to address the ongoing humanitarian challenges.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General on the issue of protecting civilians in armed conflict highlights that

> "shocking levels of brutality and casual disregard for human life and dignity have come to characterize most of today's armed conflicts." (*S/2015/453, para. 4*)

Civilians are killed and maimed in targeted or indiscriminate attacks. They are tortured, abducted, forcibly displaced and denied access to their most fundamental needs. Attacks on schools and hospitals further exacerbate the already dire state of education and health services in situations of armed conflict. Furthermore, the unspeakable and inhumane attacks of all terrorist groups, including Daesh and Boko Haram, against civilians are beyond the realm of any condemnation.

Against that background, we welcome the attention paid to the issue of the protection of civilians at the Security Council. Over the past 16 years, the Security Council has established a sound normative framework on the issue, with the adoption of various resolutions and presidential statements. Moreover, the Security Council's thematic mandates on children and armed conflict and on conflict-related sexual violence have provided opportunities to address the challenge from a more focused perspective.

Furthermore, last year's reports — namely, the report on the implementaiton of resolution 1325 (2000), the report of the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) and the report of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture (see S/2015/490) — provided us with some important recommendations. Throughout those processes, the need to further strengthen the role of peacekeeping operations and the United Nations efforts for conflict prevention were highlighted. Despite the establishment of that robust framework, the situation of civilians on the ground, unfortunately, continues to deteriorate. That is why we should devote more energy and more resources, as necessary, if we are sincere in living up to our commitments to protect civilians.

Armed conflicts create immense humanitarian needs. In fact, 80 per cent of the humanitarian crises we face today are caused or triggered by conflicts, which generate massive suffering. Focusing on prevention or addressing the root causes of conflicts should be at the top of our agenda. Nevertheless, humanitarian action

should go hand-in-hand with efforts to resolve conflicts. I would like to reiterate once again our commitment to strengthening respect for international humanitarian law.

As a concrete example, just across our border, the crisis in Syria has caused the world's largest humanitarian tragedy. United Nations assessments indicate that the humanitarian situation inside Syria continues to deteriorate, which has an immense impact on civilians. As a neighbour of Syria, Turkey is deeply and widely affected by that tragedy. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Turkey is the largest refugee-hosting country in the world today. Turkey has been a safe refuge for over 2.5 million Syrians who had to flee Syria for their lives. It has also ensured that cross-border humanitarian assistance reaches millions of people in dire need on the Syrian side of the border, in conformity with its international obligations and in support of the United Nations.

The tragic reports of starvation and death emerging from the besieged town of Madaya, Syria, are the latest blatant examples of violations of the most fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. As the Secretary-General has underscored,

> "[t]he town has been the victim of deliberate starvation. Let me be clear: the use of food as a weapon of war is a war crime."

Not only those in Madaya, but Syrians who are currently living under siege-like conditions elsewhere should be granted unhindered humanitarian access. Those responsible for horrific crimes should be reminded that impunity will not prevail, and they will be held accountable for their actions.

Finally, I would like to draw the Council's attention to the recent air strikes targeting civilians in Syria. Such attacks not only undermine the prospects of a political solution, but also exacerbate the scourge of terrorism in the region and beyond.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Peru.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to express our appreciation in seeing you, Mr. President, once again in New York to preside over this meeting. We welcome your initiative in convening this open debate and in preparing the concept note (S/2016/22, annex) to guide our discussions.

Seventy years after the establishment of the Organization, we still face significant challenges as an international community, including new threats to international peace and security. That is evident in the fact that the Security Council is increasingly discussing the actions of non-State armed actors who attack civilians. That growing concern on the part of the Council to protect civilians who are victims of armed conflict is reflected in the fact that every peacekeeping operation established in the past decade is multidimensional in nature and has a mandate that includes protection-of-civilians tasks.

Peru has broadened its perspective on participation in peacekeeping operations in the light of that multidimensional character. In addition to our joint participation with Uruguay in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, Peru has deployed a contingent for the construction and maintenance of airfields in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic. That is the first time that a Peruvian contingent has been deployed in Africa.

Peacekeeping operations face serious challenges in fulfilling their duty to protect civilians. My delegation would like to highlight three points in that regard.

First, the establishment of operations with multidimensional mandates means greater complexity in planning and implementing those mandates. In that regard, better coordination among the Security Council, the Secretariat and troop-contributing countries is required so that the vision and views of troop-contributing countries can be duly heard, given that their contingents will be responsible for implementing the mandate on the ground.

Secondly, at the operational level, missions with an explicit mandate to protect civilians should have the necessary capacity and command structure to fulfil the task effectively. To that end, uniformed personnel need to have access to better training facilities, awareness-raising and access to new technologies to make it possible for them to detect potential threats to their security and improve their ability to protect civilians. In that context, it is essential that peacekeeping operations be provided with adequate and predictable financial resources.

Thirdly, Peru believes that, when there are specific threats of physical violence against the populations they seek to protec, the use of force by troops involved

in peacekeeping operations in accordance with their mandate to protect civilians must be strictly preventive and tactical nature. In that regard, while we recognize the progress made by the Force Intervention Brigade of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to protect civilians, my delegation believes that the perception of impartiality on the part of peacekeeping missions is essential for their legitimacy on the ground, the safety of its personnel and a mission's long-term effectiveness.

Peru believes it is crucial to promote political peace agreements as a central element in preventing and resolving conflicts and protecting civilians. Similarly, it is important to ensure accountability. In that regard, when a State fails to prosecute perpetrators of crimes against civilians, the Security Council must assume its role with regard to impunity at the international level and refer such acts to the International Criminal Court.

Given that peacekeeping operations are responsible for performing the tasks of protecting civilians on the ground, I would like to conclude by stressing the urgent need to review the performance of such operations in the light of the recommendations contained in the report (see S/2015/446) of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations and in the report (S/2015/682) of the Secretary General in that regard, so that peacekeeping missions are able to effectively carry out those tasks.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2015/453), as well as Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Advisor of Oxfam for their briefings this morning. We also wish to congratulate you, Sir, as well as the the delegations of Egypt, Japan, Senegal and Ukraine, on your elections as members of the Security Council. We also express our appreciation to the five outgoing members.

The horrors of conflict and war, whose brunt is borne by civilians, serve to underscore the importance of putting an end to violations of moral standards and legal norms of war. The international community has been making every effort to protect civilians in armed conflict and to promote human rights and the dignity of the human person, in accordance with international humanitarian law. In spite of the major achievements in that regard, we continue to see grave violations and many crimes against civilians, in defiance of the determination of the international community and in blatant disregard of the results of violating international humanitarian law.

The ongoing illegal Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territories are flagrant violations of internatinal humanitarian law and human rights law. Those practices also undermine the two-State solution, agreed upon by the international community. We therefore call on the Council to provide protection to the Palestinian people, put an end to violations of their rights and implement the relevant resolutions on Palestine.

The continuing, systematic crimes by the Syrian regime and its allies gainst innocent civilians in that country, including the siege of towns, the starvation of civilians and indiscriminate bombardments with barrel bombs, are crimes against humanity and violate the Council's resolutions on Syria. The entire world has seen the scenes coming from Madaya of starving and dying people. The Syrian regime is trying to intimidate Madaya and making its population choose between starvation or bowing to a regime that continues to kill its people. Given the situation of those in besieged areas, we call on the Security Council to take every measure to deliver emergency humanitarian assistance, including via air and land, to all besieged areas, and implement paragraph 6 of resolution 2258 (2015).

Impunity for perpetrators of such grave violations has serious consequences — the violation of international instruments serves to weaken them and is detrimental to the image of the United Nations. Impunity emboldens perpetrators and leads to further violations. We must therefore make collective efforts to protect civilians and hold perpetrators to account.

Finally, we reiterate our support for all measures taken by the Security Council to protect civilians. And we underscore our respect for international instruments agreed by the international community.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Sarki (Nigeria): Nigeria congratulates you, Sir, on the commencement of your country's two-year term on the Security Council and on your assumption of the presidency of the Council. We also congratulate Egypt,

Japan, Senegal and Ukraine on their membership of the Security Council. My delegation also thanks you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, as well as for the excellent concept note (S/2016/22) that your delegation has provided to guide our deliberations. Our appreciation also goes to Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ms. Beerli, and the Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor of Oxfam, Ms. Rooijmans, for their briefings.

Nigeria aligns itself with the respective statements delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and by the Permanent Observer of the African Union on behalf of the African Union.

Conflict situations expose civilians to killings, kidnappings, torture, sexual exploitation, trafficking and other grave dangers. That is particularly so when non-State armed groups are involved. Their complete disregard for international law and international humanitarian law underscores the challenge they pose to the protection of civilians.

It is an unfortunate reality that women and girls suffer the most in conflict situations. They face sexual violence, sexual enslavement, trafficking and other forms of exploitation and degradation. Situations where women and girls are forced to provide for their families expose them even more to exploitation and abuse. We acknowledge the Security Council's commitment to the protection of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations, as exemplified by the adoption of resolutions 1325 (2000), 1960 (2010) and 2122 (2013). We believe that those resolutions provide suitable frameworks for the security Council to enhance the protection for women in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Nigeria recognizes the primary responsibility of States to protect civilians within their national jurisdictions. In that regard, we will continue to take all the necessary measures as a country, in full compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law, to protect civilians in the context of our war against the terrorist group Boko Haram. The Federal Government of Nigeria has no higher priority today than that of defeating Boko Haram and rescuing all kidnapped persons, including the Chibok girls. We are utilizing all the resources at our disposal in that effort, and we have seen positive outcomes, as the Nigerian military has rescued hundreds of civilians held hostage by Boko Haram, including women and girls.

Humanitarian access to those in need is another important dimension of the protection of civilians in conflict situations. Attacks on humanitarian workers and their families, the seizure of humanitarian supplies and other acts that inhibit the delivery of aid and negatively impact the welfare of civilians in need are grave violations of international humanitarian law, which we condemn in the strongest terms.

Nigeria shares the view that considering political solutions to conflicts in a manner that is inclusive would aid the effort to protect civilians. Nigeria urges the Council to bring its influence to bear in that regard, with a view to achieving political settlements that lead to lasting peace and thereby enhance the protection of civilians in a sustainable manner.

Protecting civilians in conflict situations remains a critical challenge, not only for the United Nations but also for the entire international community. We pay tribute to peacekeepers, humanitarian workers, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders for their hard work, often in difficult circumstances, to ensure the safety and the security of civilians.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Azerbaijan.

Ms. Mammadova (Azerbaijan): First, I would like to thank the Uruguayan presidency for organizing this open debate on such an important subject.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

I take the floor to respond to allegations made against my country by the delegation of Armenia. Those allegations are part of Armenia's practice of falsifying data and fabricating pretexts to conceal the fact that Armenia itself is directly responsible for the illegal occupation of a significant portion of the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Through its continued aggression and provocations against the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Government of Armenia imperils regional security and stability. By referring to the so-called violation of the ceasefire, Armenia seeks to justify its continued illegal military presence and use of force against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan. For the same reason,

Armenia fails to acknowledge the fact that at present the front line extends far beyond the Nagorno-Karabakh region, reaching the Agdam and Fizuli districts of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In its relevant resolutions, the Security Council condemned the seizure of those districts and all other occupied areas of Azerbaijan and demanded the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying forces from all occupied areas of Azerbaijan.

Armenia set up and effectively controls the separatist regime in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan, particularly the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh defense army. On 15 June 2015, President Sargsyan of the Republic of Armenia officially approved the rotation between the Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia and the so-called minister of the separatist regime. That particular example also proves that Armenia and the separatist regime are in fact a single entity. It should be recalled that, in a statement made on 26 September 2015, the President of Armenia alleged that Nagorno-Karabakh was "an inseparable part of Armenia".

Armenia's military provocations, aimed at violating the ceasefire regime, are regular, aggressive acts against the Republic of Azerbaijan, which are deliberately concealed. For instance, in its letter contained in document S/2015/11, while pretending to objectively inform the General Assembly and the Security Council on ceasefire violations, Armenia forgot to mention the fact that, on 12 November 2014, MI-24 combat helicopters of the airforce of the Republic of Armenia attacked the defence positions of the armed forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan near the village of Kengerly, in the Agdam district of Azerbaijan, and one of them was downed by response fire. Similarly, Armenia has never acknowledged its continued indiscriminate attacks against Azerbaijani civilians. For instance, the purposeful targeting of a wedding ceremony in a village of the Terter district on 1 September 2015 by the armed forces of Armenia from their positions on the occupied territory of Azerbaijan is yet another notorious example of Armenia's flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. As a result, three civilians, including one child, were wounded.

Throughout 2015, as a result of Armenia's illegal occupation and ceasefire violations, 22 servicemen of the Azerbaijani army were killed, 13 were wounded, 11 civilians were wounded and 1 was killed. In addition, Armenia continues targeting civilian infrastructure located in the vicinity of the front line. As a result, houses, schools and other civilian objects in Tovuz, Terter, Gedebey, Gazakh, Fizuli and Agdam districts of the Republic of Azerbaijan were destroyed.

Armenia's so-called reports on the ceasefire violations are designed to conceal their reality. The purposeful concealment of key facts attests to that country's deceptive and manipulative practices to deny its role, involvement and grave responsibility for the aggression and occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan and its consequences.

In conclusion, let me underline that the continued occupation of a big portion of the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan by the armed forces of Armenia is a main obstacle to the settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and is the only source of escalation of the situation and occurrence of hostilities. Therefore, Armenia should withdraw its armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions — namely, resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993) — and fulfil its obligation under the Charter of the United Nations, to which all Member States reaffirmed their commitment in October 2015. Without withdrawing its occupying forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan, Armenia's call for peace and alleged support for the work of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe are nothing but lofty words to conceal its annexation policy and to mislead the international community.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of Ukraine has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine): I would like to make some short comments about the statement made earlier by the delegation of the Russian Federation.

For almost two years now, the delegation of the aggressor country has been desperately trying to convince all of us in the Chamber that Russia is not a part of a conflict in Ukraine. We have already witnessed such an approach with regard to the occupied part of Ukraine — the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. I am quite sure that we all remember when the same permanent member of the Security Council by all means denied the presence of the Russian armed forces in Crimea. Afterward, we heard the confession of the

Russian President about the direct role of the Russian armed forces in the occupation of part of sovereign Ukrainian territory. On 17 December 2015, Mr. Putin acknowledged the presence of the Russian servicemen in Donbas. Following is a quote from the Russian President's website.

(*spoke in Russian*)

> "We never said that there were no people who were resolving certain issues, including in the miltary sphere."

(*spoke in English*)

Once again, I emphasize our firm commitment to the full implementation of all the provisions of the Minsk agreements by all parties without exception. Our key goal in 2016 is clear: to bring peace back to Ukraine and justice back to the international order. We believe that there is no alternative to a political solution. Our formula for a peaceful settlement is simple, that is, the withdrawal of all Russian troops from Ukraine's territory, the holding of local elections in Donbas in accordance with Ukrainian legislation and standards set by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the reinstatement of the Ukraine's full control over the border with Russia.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Several other delegations have requested the floor to make further statements. It is my intention to accede to those requests. However, I would ask each delegation to limit itself to one additional statement.

I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Shilo (Israel): During the past four months, Israelis have been stabbed in their homes, shot at in the streets and run over by terrorists using cars as weapons. Over the course of that wave of violence, 29 people were killed and hundreds were injured. One would expect that the Palestinian Authority would condemn the terrorist activities by Hamas and others and stop the increasing incitement. Instead of condemnation — instead of taking responsibility — the Palestinian leadership, unfortunately, has once again preferred to attack Israel. Since it is the easiest way to get attention, I would like to be clear.

Israel's commitment to the protection of civilians knows no colour, no ethnicity and no borders, and will always remain absolute. The Palestinian observer spoke here today about a resolution from 30 years ago. Instead of searching the United Nations archives for solutions and resolutions, I would like to remind him that, only a year and a half ago, the Palestinians refused to accept a Security Council resolution that would have improved the lives of their people and enabled the Palestinian Authority to go back to Gaza.

It seems that the Palestinian people do need protection — protection from the choices of their leadership, protection from their lack of foresight and from their refusal to go back to negotiations. Unfortunately, rather than restoring the rule of law and improving the lives of the people of Gaza and the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority choses to side with terror. It is so sad, so counter-productive.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Armenia.

Mr. Sargsyan (Armenia): My delegation requested the floor to reply to the comments made by the delegation of Azerbaijan.

We regret to see that disseminating misinformation, distorting facts and simply spreading lies have become that delegation's habitual methods. All allegations against my country and nation are strongly rejected. Instead of watching Azerbaijan's showcase of bankrupt State propaganda, I think this respected organ would be very interested in learning about the real situation on the ground across the line of contact with Nagorno Karabakh and the border with Armenia.

The Azerbaijani delegation's claims and accusations are simply baseless and fabricated, including accusing Armenia of violating the relevant Security Council resolutions and alleging an occupation. We advise the Azerbaijani delegation to read those resolutions carefully, as it appears that they have not done so over the past two decades, and try to find a single sentence about aggression by the Republic of Armenia. On the contrary, it is Azerbaijan that repeatedly violates a number of provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly by refusing to establish confidence-building measures between conflicting parties, declining to create investigative mechanisms into ceasefire violations, withdrawing snipers, ceasing warmongering at the highest level and using heavy artillery to target civilians, civilian infrastructure and institutions along Armenia's border and the contact line with Nagorno Karabakh.

The attempts at pointing fingers at others are known to be a useful tool for distracting from domestic problems. To divert attention from the unrest of its population resulting from the deteriorating socioeconomic situation in Azerbaijan, the leadership of that country has chosen the route of intensifying the ceasefire violations and massive shelling of civilian-populated border areas of Armenian Nagorno Karabakh. It is well-known and properly documented that about 20 years ago Azerbaijan unleashed a full-scale war against Armenian Nagorno Karabakh, with the intention of totally exterminating its Armenian population. However, the military aggression by Azerbaijan had unforeseen consequences for itself. As a result of the military aggression by Azerbaijan, hundreds of thousands of ethnic Armenians, including women and children, had to leave their homes and became refugees and internally displaced persons. They suffered unspeakable acts of violence and State terror by Azerbaijan. That aggression continues today. Due to the indiscriminate shelling of Armenian villages by the heavy artillery of the Azerbaijani military in the past year, the casualties of Armenian Nagorno Karabakh have doubled, and many civilians, including elderly women, have been killed.

We all know about the importance of civil society participation in the peace process, ensuring that sustainable solutions to the conflict are found and effective protection of the civilian population is achieved. The practice of systematic repression against civil society representatives, human rights defenders and peace activists and free media in Azerbaijan hinders the prospects of using people-to-people second-track diplomacy tools for conflict resolution. The strategy and tactics applied by the country concerned with respect to the Nagorno Karabakh issue prove that Azerbaijan is not interested in finding a lasting solution to the conflict and has chosen the option whose consequences are detrimental to peace in the region and result in further casualties, including among the civilian population.

The meeting rose at 7 p.m.